Socializing discourse as a factor of constructing semantics of social interaction

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Соціалізувальний дискурс як чинник конструювання смислів соціальної взаємодії

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Socializing discourse is a dynamic construct reflecting specific configurations of representations about social and political world as well as general cultural and national systems of orientation – shared meanings and definitions that enable social cohesion and interaction. Modern socializing discourse bears such general features of postmodernity as fragmentation, relativism and nihilism as well as specific peculiarities of the political environment such as "hybridization" of the traditional ideologies, "mediatization" of the political space, which, in their turn, determine the coordinates within which youth constructs the semantics of social interaction. Amorphous character of civic identification, fragmentation of the representations of political and civic participation, contradictive attitudes to norms and rules of social interaction characteristic of student representations prove the need for transformation of socializing discourse practices towards a more systemic approach and consistency in presenting objectives and strategies of social and political development, role of citizens and civic organizations in their realization, construction of rational expectations of society, government, politics, and political decision making. Most effective agents of such transformations are educational institutions and civic associations.

Key words: socializing discourse, social interaction, construction of meanings, discourse practice, transformation.

Соціалізувальний дискурс є динамічним конструктом, шо відображає як специфічні конфігурації уявлень про соціально-політичний світ, так і загально культурні та загально національні системи орієнтацій – мораль, цінності,

систему вірувань, які поділяються суспільством та уможливлюють соціальну взаємодію і взаєморозуміння. Сучасний соціалізувальний дискурс характеризується такими загальними рисами постмодерну, як фрагментарність, релятивізм та нігілізм, а особливостями його політичної складової є зокрема «гібридизація» традиційних ідеологій, «медіатизація» політичного простору, що, в свою чергу, визначає координати смислоконструювання молоддю соціальної взаємодії. Аморфність громадянської ідентифікації, фрагментарність репрезентацій досвіду участі у політичній та громадській діяльності, суперечливе ставлення до норм та правил соціальної взаємодії, що детермінують уявлення студентства, свідчать про необхідність трансформації соціалізувальних дискурсивних практик у напрямку більшої системності та послідовності у представленні цілей та стратегій суспільно-політичного розвитку, ролі громадян та громадських об'єднань у їх реалізації, конструювання раціональних очікувань щодо функціонування суспільства, державної влади, політики та процесу прийняття владних рішень. Найефективнішими агентами таких трансформацій є освітні заклади та громадянські об'єднання.

Ключові слова: соціалізувальний дискурс, соціальна взаємодія, конструювання смислів, дискурсивна практика, трансформація.

Социализирующий дискурс – это динамический конструкт, который отражает как специфические конфигурации представлений о социально-политическом мире, так и общекультурные и общенациональные системы ориентацтй – мораль, ценности, систему верований, которые разделяются обществом и служат социальному взаимодействию и взаимопониманию в нем. Современный социализирующий дискурс характеризуется такими общими чертами постмодерна, как фрагментарность, релятивизм и нигилизм, а особенностями его политической составляющей есть в частности «гибридизация» традиционных идеологий, «медиатизация» политического пространства, которые, в свою очередь, определяют координаты

конструирования молодежью смыслов социального взаимодействия. Аморфность гражданской идентификации, фрагментарность репрезентаций опыта участия в политической и гражданской деятельности, противоречивое отношение к нормам и правилам социального взаимодействия, которые детерминируют представления студенчества, свидетельствуют о необходимости трансформации социализирующих дискурсивных практик в направлении большей системности и последовательности в представлении целей и стратегий общественно-политического развития, роли граждан и гражданских объединений в их реализации, конструирования рациональных ожиданий от функционирования общества, государственной власти, политики и процесса принятия властных решений. Наиболее эффективными агентами таких трансформаций являются образовательные учреждения и гражданские объединения.

Ключевые слова: социализирующий дискурс, социальное взаимодействие, конструирование смыслов, дискурсивная практика, трансформация.

Theme. The process of structuring the political discourse of youth social interaction takes place under the influence of multitype and multivector semantic constructs produced by the subjects of political socialization including young people themselves. Discourse, as argued by I. Zhadan, not only represents images, representations and meanings of the interaction participants but also determines the boundaries of the reality. As a dynamic form of social practice, discourse constructs society, people and identity. In the framework of the existing discourse in the process of socialization, youth develops their own text. The main mechanisms of its construction are selection, interpretation and conceptualization of meanings and definitions [1].

The role of the socializing discourse as a factor of representation, image and meaning construction has been emphasized by K. Sergeiev. Referring to M. Foucault, the researcher states that any social ontology is a complex admissible

discourse, and that one's world outlook is all one can talk about. There is no external repressive mechanism to restrict one's discourse – it restricts itself. "It is not the actual social practice, it is the ideas that construct discourse and frame the space for words and muteness" [2, 42].

In other words, discourse is the representation of ethics, values and a system of beliefs, which are dominant in the society [3]. As a product of social construction discourse regulates social interaction, it is a factor of social order and social control.

The purpose of this article is to provide theoretical background of exploring discourse as a factor of meaning construction, outline peculiarities of contemporary political discourse and the socializing impact discourse practices and agents may have on transformation of meanings of social interaction.

Historical character and intersubjectity of discourse provide for its legitimization. Discourse does not appear instantaneously. Its construction is a long process of typification and coordination of activities of the social actors, who create and construct the social world in the process of communication. Intersubjectity of discourse is emphasized by E. Husserl, who argues that the essence of discourse reveals itself through individual's subjectity shared by others, intersubjectity and the "life world" of the subjects who are intentionally interconnected by communication [4]. Communication takes place if there is a meaning, a shared definition around which interaction emerge. If there is no such meaning, there is no interaction. There cannot be valid communication without a shared life context for the participants, which comprises shared definitions and meanings, which in their turn are constructed and reconstructed in the process of communication.

One of the approaches to the conceptualization process and mechanisms of discourse construction, its definitions and meanings is the theory of the social construction of reality by P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann [5], according to which the social world is not something natural and given – it is created by people and changed by people in the process of communication. Discourse as a verbal means of existence of social reality is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed accordingly, and this

process continues as long as the humankind exists. P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann propose to consider three stages of that process: externalization, objectification and internalization [5].

On the stage of *externalization* people create the social world in the process of their existence. They turn their physical environment – nature – into the social environment, into the material culture, and use it for their own purposes giving social meanings to natural phenomena. People create the nonmaterial culture with its institutional (marriage, money, etc.) and normative (values, beliefs, norms) components. The latter is the most dependable of a human being, the most abstract and the most meaningful one for human existence. Thus, it needs a higher level of regulation. To support the constructed order people develop an entire meaning system around that order. The continuum of meanings related to the skin color with the coordinates of race and racism can be one of the example of such a system. Since meanings are functionally dependent and abstract, they are contingent and precarious. However, we do not perceive them as such – we perceive them as hard, objective reality, which is due to the process of objectification.

Objectification is the process whereby people perceive their everyday life as regulated and prearranged reality, which exists independently of people and their activities. Precarious meanings are perceived as stable and as such that are not questionable. This is achieved due to their

- institutionalization (embedding in routinized behavior);
- historicity (going through generations);
- verbalization (embedding in language);
- legitimation (giving meaning cognitive and moral basis).

The last phase of the construction of social reality is the process of *internalization* whereby people learn and accept the legitimized institutional order, which, as a result, turns in a factor of inner regulation [5].

Every person has his or her own ideas, creates his or her own images and meanings. However, the nature of that process according to M. Crossley, depends on

the “raw material” which is accessible for people in their own culture. The source of such raw material is the discourse [3].

Cultural dependence and dynamics of structuring the meaning has been emphasized by D. Leontiev. Every human being exists and develops in the conditions of the previously created context of meanings, which is determined by the cultural environment. “Meaning is determined by the context, but the context does not stand still, the context is new each time…” [6, 110]. It is not possible to say anything old - everything will be new each time because of the changing context. The researcher defines three components of the context: the context of life, the contest of culture, and the context of individual experience [6].

Following W. Dilthey, W. Windelband and H. Rickert, D. Leontiev interprets construction of meaning as the process of “extracting” experience and its interpretation, as reconstruction of meanings of social actions based on meanings and definitions created by the society and the environment in which individual’s conscience developed. Adherents of the other approach (M. Weber, P. Bourdieu, E. Giddens, J. Habermas) consider meaning construction to be a process of social action rationalization, semantic correlation of actions with objective rationality as the ideal.

In view of the above mentioned provisions of the theory of discourse as a factor of meaning construction, as well as the empirically identified peculiarities of the student political world outlook structure including representations of social interaction (they have been discussed in detail in the previous articles), we shall analyze the specifics of the current social and political discourse (the context of life as put by D. Leontiev) within which student representations are constructed. Such analysis will allow identification of general tracks and possibilities to facilitate the reconstruction of social interaction meanings represented in the youth discourse.

General features of modern social and political discourse represent new type of political culture of postmodernity, whose indications are fragmentation, relativism and nihilism, deficit of democracy and lack of trust in the traditional political institutions, lack of interest in participation in the political life, low level of

involvement in civic society, and increasing transparency of the national identity frame.

Analyzing the meaning construction process in the political environment, O. Malinova names, inter alia, such features of the political discourse:

- "hybridization" of the traditional ideologies as a general feature of modernization. It manifests itself in fragmentation of the ideological field, lack of consistency and ideological continuity in formulation and presentation of the objectives and the strategies of social and political development replaced with presentation of certain single social and political problems or interests of certain political groups;
- "mediatization" of the political space, i. e. purposeful construction of representations of the activities of the political elite in the public space aiming at manipulating people's conscience, which results in increasing autonomy of activities and wafting of meanings through staging visual effects instead of facilitating rationalization of the political elite activities;
- representation of social and political realities in the discourse is not systemic, but rather determined by the relevancy to the circumstances and the needs of certain political actors;
- criticism of the status quo in the public space seems to be not less important than its legitimization;
- denial of the aims of social and political development depending on the historical and value perspective;
- legitimation of ideas by bringing them into correlation with certain concept of social good.

Such specifics of the discourse practices within which youth constructs their own representations of the political world, are characteristic of both single subjects of political socialization – mass media, political parties and government institutions, civic associations, education agents and the socializing environments as a whole. This is proved by the findings of the empirical research and the identified tendencies of

fragmentation, controversy and mythological character of the value models and strategies of social interaction, simulacrum civic identification, schematic representation of goals and means of social and political interaction, narrow radius of trust both horizontal and vertical.

Despite certain objective precipitations of the semantic structure of the youth representations of social interaction, we would like to discuss possible ways of "adjusting" the semantics of social interaction to ensure a long-time individual and social perspective. Therein we mean security and stability of citizens' lives and viability, sustainability and continuity of the society development, which, in the long run, contribute to self-development and creativity of an individual.

Tracks of transformation of the socializing discourse constructs have been drawn from the problem clusters of social interaction representations identified in the course of the empirical research. Such clusters are the amorphous civic identification, the narrow radius of interpersonal and institutional trust, the fragmented representation of the involvement in sustainable networks, vagueness in representation of civic activities, contradictive attitude to social norms and suctions.

Transformation of discourse practices of the political socialization subjects should accordingly focus on:

- systemic approach and ideological consistency in presenting objectives and strategies of social and political development, role of citizens and civic associations in their realization (opportunities with regards to decision making and responsibility);
- awareness of the value of social interaction as an instrument of defending one's interests and interests of the community, and understanding the rules of such interaction;
- search of constructive ways of resolving social controversies, e. g. usage of the technologies of cosmopolitan communication [8], according to which coordination between different groups or people is more important than reaching coherency of their positions;

- construction of the rational expectations with regards to society, government and politics, mechanisms and conditions of political decision making and their realization;
- awareness of the essence of civic activities, ways and spheres of civic intervention as well as acquisition of positive experience of citizens' (or civic associations) interaction with authorities;
- law obedience as a basic civic attitude, respect to the rule of law as well as positive experience with regards to the effectiveness of law and activities of the law enforcement bodies;
- understanding of the value of the established social norms and rules, advantages of their observation even if this entails restrictions for individual freedom;
- awareness of citizens' responsibility for the observation of the "rules of the game" in the community and positive attitude to those who care.

All the agents (or subjects) of political socialization can contribute to the outlined transformations of the socializing discourse. However, possibilities, level and effectiveness of their influence are not the same. This depends on their social functions and means of communication they possess.

The main role in the process of youth socialization is undoubtedly played by the family. This is proved by the numerous studies of the effectiveness of the influence of the main socialization agents. However, family is a private sphere, where communication may be open for recommendations, but it is not the subject to external regulations.

Prominent role in youth discourse structuring belongs to mass media, which thanks to its large number, variety, accessibility and modern IT is an effective means of communication and meaning construction. At the same time, there is a series of restrictions that minimize our expectations of media potential regarding the transformation trends outlined above. One of them is them deals with the so called mediatization of the social and political environment as it has been argued by O. Moskalenko. It implies that media purposefully constructs representations of certain

political elites' activities in order to manipulate citizens' minds and support those elites in achieving their political goals instead of presenting unbiased information, systemic analysis of social and political processes and exposing citizens to different trends and concepts of social and political development. An objective ground for such a restriction is a specific format of the communication process with the media. Within that communication there is no exchange of information as such – in the majority of cases the other side acts exclusively as the recipient of the information.

Unlike media, education institutions and civic organizations have to and are capable of supporting active communication due to their institutional functions. The first do it in the community of educational actors, the latter – among members of civic organizations and broader public. Such communication presupposes not only information exchange, but also formulation of objectives, development of strategies of their reaching in the process of involvement into common cognitive and civic activities. This requires reaching consent on discourse practices and construction of the shared discourse.

Numerous studies in the field of political socialization prove the role of education and educational experience in development of youth social interaction strategies [10; 11]. They state that young people, who obtain social knowledge and skills in the process of education, have a possibility to participate in discussions and debates, learn to take part in voluntary activities in the local community, more often demonstrate social responsibility, solidarity, and readiness to be involved in different forms of civic activities. Two types of educational activities of the educational institutions deserve special attention. They are:

- creation of educational situations which involve youth interaction, coordination, set-up of common objectives and development of mutually acceptable strategies of problem solving and meeting real needs of the community;
- offering opportunities for youth participation in a wide range of civic organization, clubs and associations.

In the process of interaction its participants have to find ways to coordinate different, sometimes opposite stand points and views. To do this one should, firstly, define the coherence line in view of the fact that different participants have different perceptions of the reasons, the consequences and the time frame of the actual problem solution, as well as of the logic of their own actions and actions of the other party; secondly, develop a communication technology where every party is perceived and treated as “one of us”, as well as construct a “common language”; thirdly, be prepared to accept and recognize the results of the common activities, which may defer from those which were originally planned by the communicators [8].

Student involvement into meaningful, real but not a functional activity through realization of social projects and voluntary activities makes it possible to link their learning experience with the solution of the actual problems of the community. Young people obtain skills to act and reach objectives, realize their own capability to influence the environment, get positive experience of social interaction. Young people take a stand when they realize that a social problem is relevant to them, and a condition for its relevance is awareness of the responsibility for its solution.

Studies proves that even as an obligatory type of educational activities youth involvement into voluntary work is an effective way of development of social abilities, responsibility and consolidation of political and social identity [12].

Youth gets the experience of interaction in a group. Young people learn what it means to be group or organization members, have rights, influence the group decision-making process and take the responsibility for the mission of the group. They gain such experience through participation in civic associations. Analyzing mechanisms of the impact of the civic association membership on developing youth motivation for social involvement, C. Flanagan states that despite the fact that social remuneration is one of the major motives of membership for most young people, their adherence to values and ideals of those organizations as well as solidarity and identification with them grow with the time. If an individual feels solidarity with the group, he or she can sacrifice their personal achievements for the community

wellbeing [10]. At the same time young people experience collective effectiveness, i. e. belief in the group capability to achieve something together, in cooperation with other members, especially if that cooperation is successful. Since social and political aims are as a rule achieved through a collective action, it is another important mechanism of developing youth motivation for civic participation.

Special emphasis on the importance of membership in civic organizations was placed by A. de Tocqueville, who argued that only through interaction in civic associations can people learn critical lessons in cooperation and discipline, shape their moral virtue, develop their intellect, public spiritedness, and willingness and ability to participate in self-government [13, 14].

Conclusions. The main agents of socializing discourse practices that promote youth awareness raising with regards to values of social interaction as an instrument of protecting their own interests and interests of the community as well as exercising rules of such interaction are educational institutions and civic associations.

Education and civic discourse are not isolated from the socializing discourse and can hardly compete with such powerful socializing agent as, for example, mass media. Thus, a condition for reconstruction of the semantics of social interaction in the political world outlook of the university students is the coordination of discourse practices of all the major socializing agents on the track of conceptualization (or reconceptualization) of the basics of political socialization, specification of its goals and strategies in view of the current social and political environment as well as perspectives and priorities of the national development [15].

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