REVISTA ESPACIOS

Rhetorical relations of concession and their pragmatic role in the development of blog texts

Relaciones retóricas de concesión y su papel pragmático en el desenvolvimiento de textos de blogs

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ABSTRACT:

The relevance of the article is due to the significant expansion of Internet communication, especially in the blogs that are more and more often becoming the subject of the analysis from the linguistic and semantic points. The article is aimed at identifying the specifics of the rhetorical relations of concession, taking into account the type of connection that can be traced between the segments of statements belonging to different bloggers-interlocutors, but forming an integral fragment of computer-mediated communication. The use of the method of analyzing blog texts, the descriptive-analytical (contextual) method and the method of modeling rhetorical concessionary relations allowed identifying the pragmatic specifics of the recipient`s message-commentary. In the course of the study, it was substantiated that such messages are characterized by the specific patterns of coherent deployment and functioning conventions as part of a holistic blog text. It was also shown that the response message always includes a counterargument against the stimulating judgment of the blogger in its semantic structure, which is preceded, as a rule, by the unmarked agreement with the semantic position of the communication initiator. As a result, it was concluded that the coherence of the blog text fragment, including the stimulus and reaction, is formed on the basis of the notion that the initiating and reacting messages are connected on the basis of the rhetorical relations of concession. The materials of the article can be used in the practical activities of teachers, linguists and social psychologists.
Keywords: text of blog, rhetorical relations, concession, context, stimulus, response

RESUMEN:

La relevancia del artículo está condicionada por el considerable crecimiento de la comunicación en Internet, sobre todo en los blogs que, con más frecuencia, se convierten en el objeto del análisis desde el punto de vista lingüístico y semántico. El artículo está encaminado en detectar el carácter específico de las relaciones retóricas de concesión tomando en consideración el tipo de comunicación que se sigue entre los segmentos de opiniones que pertenecen a distintos interlocutores – blogueros, pero que forman un fragmento íntegro de la comunicación mediada por ordenador. En calidad de los métodos de la investigación utilizamos el método del análisis de textos de blogs, el método descriptivo y analítico (contextual) y el método de simulación de relaciones de concesión ritóricas, lo que nos permitió enfocarnos en la detección del carácter específico pragmático del mensaje comentario reactivo del destinatario. En el proceso de la investigación fue argumentado que para éste son características las regularidades específicas del desenvolvimiento coherente y la convención del funcionamiento dentro de un texto íntegro del blog. Además, fue demostrado que el mensaje – reacción siempre incluye en su estructura semántica un argumento contrario en contra de la opinión estimulante del bloguero a la que precede, en general, un consentimiento no marcado con la postura semántica del iniciador de la comunicación. Como resultado, llegamos a la conclusión de que la coherencia del fragmento del texto del blog que incluye el estímulo y la reacción, se forma por el hecho de que los mensajes de inicio y de reacción están conectados sobre la base de las relaciones ritóricas de

1. Introduction

Blogosphere presents intended self-expression of an individual who makes consistent attempts to produce a desired impression on the individual's interlocutors, controls the information made public and its language / speech arrangement (Kudryashov & Kalashnikova, 2015; Marchenko, 2012). A blog is first of all a joint online diary updated at a frequency where users of the Internet network place entries about their personal experience and interests, as a rule, in the reverse chronological order. Current posts by bloggers represent a discursive continuum ranging between a monologue and a dialogue because they are targeted mainly at the broad audience of the Internet users. Blogosphere is a global phenomenon overrunning visible and invisible boundaries between various languages and communities, enabling people to overcome the conflict of interests and arrive at a shared opinion (Badmaeva, 2014; Barkovich, 2015; Viktorova, 2018).

Texts of blogs have a rhetorical nature as they are formed in the process of discourse interaction of their authors and readers reflected in communicative objectives of the joint text work. Current objectives can be considered as stimuli of incremental development of all communicative processes which therefore are the rhetorical phenomena. With regard to this, the objective of fulfilling a certain communicative event is "attached" to a typified context.

The relevance of the research is predetermined by the following factors. The analysis of theoretical and applied problems of computer-mediated exchange allows getting another view of the conventional problem of mutual relations between the person-to-person dialogic interaction and virtual communication (concerning the specific nature of dialogic discourse in the direct daily exchange (Kudryashov, 2017). According to the classical ideas, communication is a sequence of verbal actions and responses to them, a series of actions carried out in the intersubjective space. With the problem range considered in this article taken into account, virtual communication can be treated as a result of complicated coordinated activity, an event, a generating conversational space where personal and social mutual relations of individuals are closely intertwined. Virtual communication is not so much the process of transferring the relevant information rather than activating social, linguocultural and psychological mutual relations of individuals, a process relying on which the interlocutors construct the particular virtual reality. This reality "thins down" the structural and procedural characteristics of communication.

2. Literature Review

Within the theory of rhetorical structures, the specific way of functioning of language and text organization in the actual conditions of dialogue partners' interaction is revealed consistently (Mann et al., 1992). Organization of text is treated in terms of those interdependencies that are formed between text segments. This theoretical concept explains the cohesion of text relying on stating the hierarchic, coherent structures inside which every chunk, every part has a certain semantic function to perform in relation to other chunks.

In the current linguistic studies, the notion of concession is frequently associated with such relations between the utterance segments as to imply a subtle contrast: one of the segments does not logically allow the opportunity for fulfilling the other segment because the latter contradicts to preliminary expectations of the speaking subject and the very situation of exchange (Kovalchuk & Volodina, 2016; Volodina & Kovalchuk, 2019).

Within the theory of rhetorical structures, concessive relations are formed by the core (a situation supported by the sender) and the satellite (a situation which is incompatible with the previous one but is supported by the sender, too). The core is the segment of the utterance that represents the carefully thought out situation; the satellite is the utterance segment in which the situation potentially conflicting with the former one is reflected. Meanwhile, it has to be borne in mind that no direct correspondence is found between the syntactic and rhetorical status of the utterance segment, hence the core cannot be identified as the main clause and the satellite as a dependent clause unambiguously (Mann & Thompson, 1988).

Fulfillment of rhetorical relations of concession within the context of these chunks confirms that the respondent:

(1) does not prove wrong the situation previously presented by a blogger (as it is the case when rhetorical relations of contrast are fulfilled);

(2) arranges his or her reactive – and largely subjective – judgment relying on such stable grammatical models that allow accepting that this situation can be considered as one corresponding to the actual state of things, although there are no sufficient grounds and arguments for it.

3. Methodological Framework of the Research

The objective of this research consists in performing the structural and pragmatic analysis of concessive rhetorical relations in the texts of blogs. The objective demanded completing the following tasks:

- singling out the main components of the model of concessive rhetorical relations in the joint discourse of a blogger and a respondent;
- identifying the structural role of concessive rhetorical semantics in achieving the agreement between participants of computer-mediated communication and a conflict-free prospect of development of this communication;
- tracing the pragmatic specific nature of the recipient's reactive action during generating the main model of concessive rhetorical relations in the blog texts.

The objective and tasks dealt with in this research are achieved by using the following research methods: 1) the method of blog texts in the process of finding out the specific characteristics of cohesion means that are discovered between the stimulus and the response; 2) the descriptive and analytical (contextual) method involving the analysis of chunks of the blog texts where concessive rhetorical relations are made relevant; 3) the method of modeling the concessive rhetorical relations between components of the stimulating and reacting messages within the context of the integral dialogic unity.

The rhetoricalness of blog texts identifies the following research implications that are essential for this work:

- in the process of language functioning, communicative objectives of a jointly generated text work are achieved efficiently;
- the genre of blog text predetermines the particular language structures and pragmatic / linguocultural characteristics prevailing in it.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the authors' observations, rhetorical relations of concession between the stimulating point and the reactive judgment are not always marked by formal indicators, i.e. meaningful cohesion can be found between these blog text segments. Meanwhile, some cases of relations of concession being fulfilled get into the spotlight of the authors' researcher attention that are formed not within the turn of one interlocutor but between the blogger's initiating reason and the respondent's reacting judgment. Here, concession is achieved by the respondent while the blogger ensures the context of exchange for the subsequent concession. Cf.:

> (1) " – *The anger with the legend did not last long: the entire stadium applauded the high shot of his at the beginning of the second half.... Several fans ran out at Ronaldo… Confirming his confidence, Ronaldo took a picture with the guys and made sure they were not pushed too hard off the pitch".*
>
> *– Yeah, but regardless of the team he plays for, he will always stay the spotted red devil, in my memory"* (Blog London Eye, 2018).

The blogger offers for discussion the situation at the stadium witnessed by him. Essentially, in the initiating turn, objective facts are listed that took place after the football game. The facts are comprehended subjectively to a certain extent: the blogger reasons about the emotional and will condition of the participants of the situation (the well-known football player and fans). One of the respondents draws the blogger's attention to the famous player in order to enhance the subjective component of the exchange and express a personal opinion.

Agreeing with the blogger's stance, this respondent states there is a rational kernel in his message and at the same time – as a balance for this message – voices his own viewpoint switching the

exchange mode from the positive prospect to the negative fulfillment. Within the context of virtual interaction, the formal acceptance of the blogger's stance enables the respondent to take the edge off his subsequent disagreement and to present subjectively colored arguments against the initial statements.

In the rhetorics of computer-mediated exchange, the segments of the respondent's message modeling the concessive semantics act as a valid discourse way of expressing the potential disagreement with the blogger. The respondent reacts to the stimulus by means of the concessive rhetorical structure in order to highlight the contrast between the alternative viewpoints, to switch the exchange format into a completely opposite plane of emotions. In other words, the semantics of concession is treated in the authors' research as one of the rhetorical means for recreating the contrast which generates no conflict between interlocutors as it is accompanied by agreeing with the opinion of the exchange initiator. In this case, the agreement turn reveals the respondent's viewpoint being completely or partially in tune with the blogger's judgments.

The initiator of exchange reveals an interesting piece of information about an event he participated in. The reacting interlocutor acts on the blogger's mode. One can speak about the participants of virtual exchange fulfilling one and the same communicative strategy aimed at involving more respondents into the conversation and thus further detailing the dictum and mode information presented in the stimulus and the response.

The analysis of the text chunk (1) has shown the architectonics of rhetorical relations of concession is shaped by three speech actions of the computer-mediated exchange participants as follows:

- the blogger's stimulating message that encompasses facts, reasoning, evaluative judgments about the state of things under discussion expressed by assertive speech acts;
- the respondent's accepting the validity and logical relevance of this message (means of fulfillment – the word *yeah*);
- the respondent's expressing the alternative viewpoint (means of fulfillment – adversative conjunction *but*) which is intended to act on the blogger's emotional and will sphere and so to stimulate him and other respondents for further development of the virtual communication.

Shaping the main pragmatic model of concessive rhetorical relations in computer-mediated exchange is associated with as explicit as possible expression of those segments of the interlocutors' messages that joining each other bring into life the relevant semantic content of the text. Cf.:

> (2) "– *In pair skating, this season looks like a flop sequel to a great movie. While the previous Olympic cycle had 8-10 strong couples in, it is a tangible crisis after PyeongChang…*
>
> *– Now most ice figure skaters rather resemble robots doing required elements to the music. No artistic imagery is in question, either. And this is very sad…* **However,** *Tarasova and Morozov are* **anyway** *one of the most stable couples. You only need one hand to count their backslides…*" (Blog Bez nedokrutov [No under-rotations], 2018).
>
> Taking into account the semantic and pragmatic content of conversational moves of the blogger and the respondent, the chunk of computer-mediated exchange (2) can be presented as follows:
>
> (2') "– **(X)** *In pair skating, this season looks like a flop sequel to a great movie. While the previous Olympic cycle had 8-10 strong couples in, it is a tangible crisis after PyeongChang …*
>
> *–* **(X')** *Now most ice figure skaters rather resemble robots doing required elements to the music. No artistic imagery is in question, either. And this is very sad…*
>
> **(Y)** **However,** *Tarasova and Morozov are* **anyway** *one of the most stable couples. You only need one hand to count their backslides. And this is very telling…*"

Initiating conversational move **(X)**, the blogger puts forward his evaluative judgments as for the crisis state of things formed in the Russian ice figure skating. The subjectivity of these judgments is clearly enhanced by means of the figurative comparison of the kind of sport under analysis to a flop sequel of a popular movie and the definition for the key word of the message (cf. ***the tangible*** *crisis*). All these stylistic devices not only mirror the blogger's negative emotions for the situation being discussed but they also implicitly indicate that the object of evaluation is not up to its standard natural condition in its current essential parameters.

The respondent's reactive turn includes two conversational moves:

- **(X')**: proceeding from a not less subjective perception of the situation being discussed, the interlocutor supports the exchange initiator's viewpoint and focuses the exchange participants' attention, too, on the fact that the subject being evaluated deviates from its natural norm relying on the same stylistic devices (cf., in particular, the figurative comparison *Now most ice figure skaters rather resemble robots doing required elements to the music*); he also intensifies the emotion of displeasure and irritation initially expressed by the blogger;
- **(Y)** the interlocutor expresses the alternative opinion which in fact makes up a contrast to the blogger's initial statements and yet creates no conflict situation in the exchange owing to previously expressed concession for the exchange initiator's conceptual standpoint. Within the context of computer-mediated communication, emotional tinges of displeasure and indignation recede into the background – which, in its turn, is predetermined by the respondent's idea of influencing the blogger's mode sphere in order to change his pragmatic attitude to the situation being discussed.

The respondent's reacting message can be characterized as a polyfunctional conversational move consisting of two parts – the introductive one, **(X'),** and the basic one, **(Y)**. These parts differ from each other by the dissimilar (opposite) communicative content. The processes of combining these parts of the message are predetermined by initial attitudes of the reacting subject as for shifting the communicative center of exchange toward the basic component. The respondent uses introductive part **(X')** to produce intensified influence on the blogger's mode, and in basic part **(Y)** the priority is given to the dictum constituent of the exchange and objective facts are cited that point to the inadequacy of the blogger's viewpoint. In other words, conversational move **(Y)** implies not only a judgment giving evidence about the opposite state of things in ice figure skating but also reasons to back up the judgment.

Conversational move **(X')** fulfills concession for the initial blogger's opinion. Notably, the concession is not marked by any evident language means; it is arranged as an implicit agreement with the mode and dictum constituent of the stimulating message. Conversational move **(Y)** encapsulates concession for the reacting subject's own opinion. In this case, concessive rhetorical relations are marked by adversative conjunction *however* andparticle *anyway*.

Marking of rhetorical concession seems to be intended for:

- enhancing the validity of the conceptual stance adhered to by the respondent in the exchange by means of broadening the blogger's knowledge about the discussed situation in ice figure skating;
- switching the blogger's emotional and will frame of mind to the opposite direction;
- persuading the blogger of the necessity to glance at the situation under discussion at a different angle due to the indisputable facts available (the couple of ice figure skaters, Tarasova and Morozov, demonstrate considerable potential for the world leadership, as they have few "backslides", and so the statement about there being a crisis in ice figure skating is hasty and precipitate).

Within computer-mediated communication, modeling of rhetorical relations of concession implies taking into account parity participation of both interlocutors: the respondent concedes to the blogger in the course of discussing a certain situation by putting forward the alternative (potentially contrasting) judgment. The cognitive nature of potential contrast of the standpoints expressed is based on dialogic activity of the blogger and the respondent associated with interpreting the implicit knowledge from each other's messages. In other words, segments **(X)** and **(Y)** involved in shaping the rhetorical relations of concession are treated by the blogger and the respondent as the alternative views of the situation being discussed, with the current virtual exchange context borne in mind.

Below a chunk of blog text is given where another constructive pragmatic dimension of forming the concessive rhetorical relations within computer-mediated communication is manifested consistently (the blogger and the respondent discuss playing of Niko Kovač, the halfback for Bayern, in the game with Borussia club):

> (3) "– **(X)** *Niko Kovač failed in every way: it is hard to credit him even with his power at the start, as it exhausted Bayern too much, and the team proved unable to defend without pressing. There was an option of defense with total control (which Bayern does often), but there was no control because Kovač did not even try to compensate for missing Thiago, ignoring James both before and during the game… he responded badly to Favre's substitutions…*
>
> – **(X')** *Bayern did play poorly. Niko lost even at the press conference, he showed disrespect for his opponent. Favre wised up an objective and precise analysis which actually made him the co-author of this text. And that's the rubbish Kovač answered to it with: "Unfortunately, we lost, although we could also end in a draw. One can be satisfied with such a game. We have to use this basis and play at this level in the future".*

(Y) *Alongside with that*, *he made fierce attempts to change the game, he refreshed positions and let out those who theoretically could help in the scenario chosen by Favre. For example, Sandro Wagner is really more to the point with long balls…"* (Blog Hello, 2018).

Initiating virtual exchange, the blogger puts forward negative judgments **(X)** as for playing of the well-known halfback of Bayern in the game with Borussia and cites objective facts that act as reasoning for the opinion expressed. Reacting to the judgments by message **(X')**, the respondent details the argument foundations of the blogger's viewpoint (cf. *failed in every way – lost even at the press conference*), gives new grounds for this viewpoint, actually supporting the exchange initiator's stance and the emotional and will frame of mind. The stimulating and the reactive messages making up the blog text chunk turn out to be in tune in their stylistic arrangement: the respondent focusing the exchange participants' attention on the validity of the blogger's conceptual standpoint and detailing the arguments for the initial judgment, just like the blogger, makes use of the colloquial stylistic register of presenting his opinion (cf. *wised up an … analysis, the rubbish … answered to it with*).

So, the blogger and other readers get an impression that the reacting respondent completely agrees with the point of view serving the stimulus for the current exchange and makes a concession for this viewpoint. However, with the subsequent conversational move **(Y),** the respondent gives grounds for the fact that the blogger's opinion turns out to be only partially valid: Kovač failed in every way but at the same time made decisive steps to save the game.

The argument given by the respondent is aimed at highlighting the falseness of the blogger's ideas: it was not "responded badly to Favre's substitutions" that Kovač did but he let out the player because he could in theory contribute to a positive development of the scenario of the game. Again, concession for the initial blogger's opinion and detailing that opinion while relying on the same register of style become the relevant pragmatic basis for the respondent to voice his point of view which does not coincide with the standpoint of the initiator of virtual exchange.

Rhetorical concession for the stimulating opinion is not marked by any language means; it is arranged as the unconditional support of the blogger's emotional and will frame of mind. Meanwhile, concession for the own opinion is marked by explicit means (introductory word *alongside with that*). The fact the concession opinion is marked gives evidence about the relevance of the facts that were not initially taken into account by the blogger and about the alternative view of the situation being discussed in general. By making the initial concession for the blogger's viewpoint and by finding relevant grounds for supporting it, the respondent fulfills his communicative strategy which is aimed at making personal ideas about the discussed situation relevant.

With regard to this, the reacting interlocutor manifests both his agreement and disagreement with the blogger's stance, emotional and figurative justification of this stance. Within the context of virtual exchange, agreement is treated by the authors as manifesting the complete or partial coincidence, while disagreement – as a complete or partial mismatch of the respondent's opinion with judgments of the blogger. Reactive modeling of agreement and disagreement responses in the blog text is predetermined by the dictum content of the stimulating message.

When detailing the standpoint voiced in the blogger's stimulating judgment **(X)** in retrospect, the respondent supports the set by the sender emotional content of the exchange by performing concessive reaction **(X')**. Conversational moves **(X) and (X')** turn out to be connected by the single thematic grid, i.e. the system of evaluative lexemes that fulfill the similar stylistic function framing the situation under discussion in the same emotional light.

In particular, in the chunk of the interlocutors' interrelated conversational moves **(X) and (X')** cited in example (1), the lexical field is clearly emphasized that emotionally manifests the situation "bad playing of the football player Niko Kovač" (which is the subject of evaluation and discussion in the virtual exchange) in a similar way. This field is built with the following means relied on:

- verb phrases that characterize the halfback's professional activity during the game and the subsequent press-conference in a subjective way (*failed in every way, did not try to compensate for missing Thiago, ignoring James both before and during the game, responded badly to Favre's substitutions; lost even at the press conference, showed disrespect for his opponent, the rubbish … answered to it with*);
- verb phrases and utterances that characterize in a subjective way the consequences of the halfback's bad playing during the game (*it exhausted Bayern too much; the team proved unable to defend without pressing; there was no control; Bayern did play poorly*).

These means form an integral thematic grid and are distinguished by the commonality of negative connotations and meanings expressed within the virtual exchange. Syntagmatic relations that are established between these features in the text chunk of the blog are revealed in their implied mutual relations. For instance, as for the implicational of the proper noun *Niko Kovač,* the weak implicational (low-probability) parameter *one can be satisfied with such a game* that is given in the quote of the very halfback's speech at the interview (given in the respondent's message) appears to be essential. The language means under analysis are thematically connected into a linear text sequence and exhibit semantic commonality. Due to this, virtual exchange chunk **(X)–(X')** in which the initial stage of fulfilling the rhetorical relations of concession is modeled forms an integral text – in spite of its containing no clear markers of this type of relations.

The next conversational move of the respondent, **(Y),** noticeably disrupts the emotional harmony of the virtual exchange having been formed and makes up a sort of contrast to the blogger's initial conversational move **(X)** and simultaneously a concession for his own opinion backed up by objective facts. Fulfilling the concessive semantics, in fact, this move secures the relations of contrast between the alternative views of one and the same proposition (tactic moves of the well-known halfback of Bayern during the game with Borussia).

Meanwhile, the respondent suggests in his message the concessive semantics by partially recognizing the validity of the judgment voiced by the blogger earlier. In other words, the participant of computer-mediated exchange makes concession for the dialogue initiator's standpoint accepting that the dictum content of the message initiated by him is valid only in part.

As the authors' observations clearly confirm, moves of the blogger and the respondent (**X, X', Y**) that model concessive rhetorical relations in computer-mediated communication are carried out with relying on syntactic units showing various extent of complexity. So, in chunks (1)–(3) the interlocutors' conversational moves are manifested by both simple and compound sentences.

5. Conclusion

The specific way concessive rhetorical relations function within computer-mediated exchange gets the relevant pragmatic explanation, with the main model considered. By recreating this model in the virtual text, the respondent fulfills the opportunities of (partially) accepting the blogger's point of view and giving grounds for the alternative (contrasting) conceptual stance within constructive development of computer-mediated communication. The authors believe studying rhetorical structures and relations of this kind reveals essential functional and pragmatic implications for the multi-aspect analysis of the dynamic nature of blog texts.

The main model of concessive rhetorical relations is consistently fulfilled within the context of not only dissimilar, alternative viewpoints of the communicants but also if the exchange is in tune. In other words, the model under consideration manifests its constructive potential in the following contexts of person-to-person interaction of the dialogue partners:

- the reacting interlocutor states the blogger's messages **(X)** are valid only partially;
- the reacting interlocutor confirms the validity of both the initial **(X)** and the reacting (this interlocutor's) opinion **(Y)** and stimulates the blogger for describing the state of things being discussed from the alternative (contrasting) standpoint (i.e. proceeding from the personal opinion presented in the conversational move **(Y)**).

Pragmatic particularities of recreating the concessive rhetorical relations in the main model are predetermined by the connection of stimulating and reacting messages between which compositional and semantic opposition is established. The phenomena of oppositions at the level of organizing elusive disagreements by composition and semantics in the dialogic actions of the blogger and the respondent shed some light on the fact that while discussing a situation from the sport world the interlocutors deliberately leave gaps between propositions of their messages and contrast the semantic content of stimulating and reactive conversational moves. Within the context of such oppositions, the conventions of communicants' cooperation are observed and unanimity is achieved in the process of expressing personal standpoints which in its turn proves to be a valid controller of development and cohesion of the blog text.

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