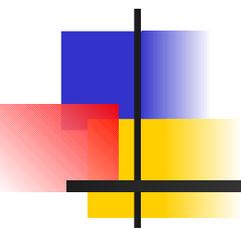


Author's Self-Reference in Academic Texts in Russian and English

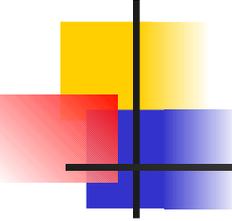


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2 Biennial International English Teaching Conference
"Secrets of Teaching EFL"
Narva, March 17-18, 2008

Saxonic vs. Teutonic style



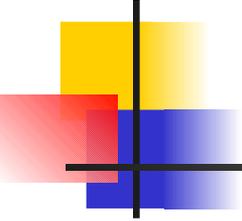
SAXONIC

- Cooperative
- Reader-oriented
- Text-constructive
- Dialog-incorporating
- High degree of explicitness

TEUTONIC

- *Wissendarstellung*
- Author-oriented
- Few signposts
- Establishing authority in the discipline
- High degree of implicitness

Peculiarities of Russian academic texts



- Text organization

(As is well-known...)

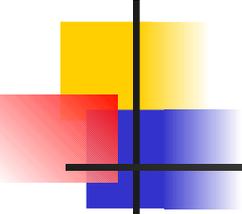
- Hedging

- “Naked” (unsupported) statements

- Self-reference

(editorial “we”)

SELF-REFERENCE IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC TEXTS

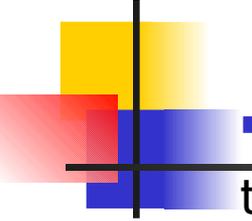
- 
- According to Russell (Russell 1946: 17), “Scientific knowledge aims at being wholly impersonal, and tries to state what has been discovered by the collective intellect of mankind”; hence the preference of impersonal constructions in academic texts
 - On the other hand, McGinn believes, that our brain “applies a constant subjective perspective to the world” (McGinn 1983: 69); thus, the use of “I” is justified

SELF-REFERENCE IN RUSSIAN ACADEMIC TEXTS

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

- 1) As Sternin (2006: 100) postulates when he investigates the traits of Russian communicative behavior, the idea of “sobornost” is one of the cornerstones in the Russian mentality.
- 2) Cf. the works of Lomonosov, Sreznevski, Shakhmatov, Scherba “Умолчевая здесь об оных органических членах, *рассудим* (we will discuss) токмо о несчетном различии, первое, голоса, второе, выговора” (Lomonosov, 1757)
“На некоторые данные в пользу исконности южной родины русского племени *я (I)* укажу ниже. Здесь же *ставлю (I) see the connection* в связь наличность общих явлений в языках русском и южнославянских... ” (Shakhmatov)
- 3) During the Soviet times, the expression of the individual “I” was regarded immodest, ideologically incorrect, labeled as wrong by the editors and changed into the more acceptable “we”.

SELF-REFERENCE IN RUSSIAN ACADEMIC TEXTS (cont'd)



- LINGUISTIC REASONS

the deictic nature of personal pronouns –

common “footing” for writer/reader

Following the Russian tradition of self-reference the writer would resort to the conventional “we”, consequently shifting the footing. The usage of “we” presumes a collective mind behind each claim, statement and conclusion made, hence, the illocutional force of the claim, statement and conclusion is strengthened and opposed to the individual reader’s “you”, albeit implicit and indirect.

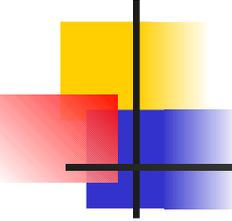
SELF-REFERENCE IN RUSSIAN ACADEMIC TEXTS (cont'd)

- Instructional materials

“The formal-logical (collective) way of rendering the material conditions the usage of pronouns in scientific and technical literature: personal pronouns have relative-generalizing features and are used mostly in the form of the first person plural and in the form of the third person singular and plural, seldom – in the form of second person and almost never used in the form of the first person singular” (Demidova 1991: 11)

“The style of written scientific discourse is an impersonalized monologue. Relatively rare are the forms of the 1st person singular, and the form of the 2nd person singular is never used. The author’s “I” steps to the background, as it were. It has become an “unwritten law” when the author of a dissertation writes in the plural and instead of “I” uses “we”, considering that the expression of the authorship as a formal group of people adding to the objectivity of presentation.” (Kuzin 2003: 73)

ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY



- Methodology

A comparative analysis of a corpus of academic texts in English and Russian (30 and 50 authors respectively) in the field of humanities taken from scientific professional journals, on-line editions, books, and proceedings of conferences.

ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY (cont'd)

English academic texts

•Jarvis (2002)

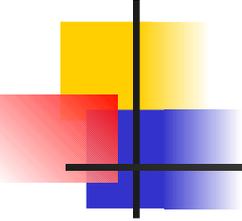
- Six years ago, while beginning my teacher education program, **I** came across a book called *Whole Language Strategies for ESL Students* by Gail Heald-Taylor (1994).

•Hammer & Kellner (2001)

- **We** cannot attempt to begin to describe "the undescribable" in this text. It would obviously be inappropriate and difficult to aspire to recount the kinds of experiences captured in these records in a fashion that adequately summon the plethora of emotions they evoke, as well as the wide expanse of human frailties, talents, courage, love, altruism, fortitude and horrors they display.

ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY (cont'd)

Russian academic texts



Авсеенко (2006)

- **Мы** 11 не беремся за решение сложного философского вопроса - хороши ли изменения или нет, ибо существует множество точек зрения по этому вопросу и, кроме того, это не тема **нашей** работы. **Мы** 11 лишь проследим тенденцию, которая наблюдается в одном из аспектов жиз-недеятельности человека и которому современные ученые уделяют много внимания - рекламе.

Гусева (2002)

- Сколько раз должно встретиться имя среди собранных кошачьих, чтобы иметь коэффициент частотности не меньше 5? Минимум 22 раза, т.е. назвать частотными **мы** можем лишь имена *Муся* и *Барсик*, даже *Вася* сюда не попадет.

Мамаева (2002)

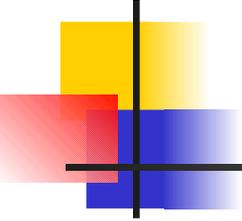
- Очевидно, что процесс коммуникации не сводится к процессу передачи кодированного сообщения от одного индивидуума к другому. В Женевской школе речевой прагматики были разработаны правила диалога. **Остановимся** на четырех основных положениях этих правил...

ANALYSIS OF EMPIRICAL STUDY (cont'd)

RESULTS

- Twenty nine out of the thirty authors of the articles in English (96%) used the first person singular pronoun "I" to refer to themselves. Unless, of course, the authorship belonged to two or three people; then, the first person plural pronoun "we" was employed
- The most frequently used form of self-reference in the Russian corpus was the plural personal pronoun "мы" (we) or plural possessive pronoun "наши" (our): 23 authors (46%) employed this strategy. Quite a few authors (11, i.e. 22%) used "we" inclusively, taking the reader on the mutual contract of action expressed by the verb. Sometimes, the pronoun would not be used explicitly, but the grammatical form of the verb would prompt that it is inclusive, for example "посмотрим", "сравним", "остановимся", etc.

Conclusions



- Given the difference in academic styles, it is important to be aware of the cultural norms of the academic community you are writing for
- With the ever-increasing role of the English language in the academic world, Saxonian style of writing requires particular attention from material writers and teachers of academic writing