

## CODE PREFERENCES OF 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS – CASE STUDY OF “SOCIOLOGY OF DISPOSITIONAL GROUPS” STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

Because of the formal and non-formal changes which are taking place in Polish higher education, the role and function of the university is also changing. Contemporary Polish students consider higher education as one of the phases of their career. The new generations of students expect rapid and effective education, perceiving academic education as a purchase of services or professional training. The aim of the study was to diagnose if those trends are visible also in the processes of communication between the students and the academic staff. To verify this thesis, the author diagnoses the language expression of students, in the form of essay writing. Expressions were analysed quantitatively and were correlated with some chosen indicators of the students social background.

Results indicated that students language expression could be divided into three types: mixed, restricted and elaborate expression. Each of those types can be classified as social codes, which have their own features. Gathered data only partially confirmed the hypothesis tested by the author. Because of the low scale of the study, it can only be considered an inspiration for other researchers and future studies on a high-scale level.

**Keywords:** elaborate code, restricted code, cultural capital, language code.

### THEORY – LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

According to the assumptions of the structuralist theory of language, language organises the mental processes of man, partially mediating in the cognitive processes (Hill, Mannheim, 1992, pp. 382-400). Created order is expressed through practical functioning in society (Rafferty 1972; Robinson 1972; Beveridge, Spencer, Mitter, 1978; Durkin, Conti-Ramsden, 2007; Hartas, 2011). One of the most frequent activities in modern societies is communication. The aforementioned activity may occur through language as a tool of communication.

Each language activity is expressed on the basis of universal rules, which are described as language (Burszta, 1998, pp.66-74). Language rules are common for all members of a society, who use any type of language.

Basil Bernstein's theory of language codes assumes, in accordance with the structuralist school, that language organizes cognition processes of each person. However, as a set of arbitrary rules, conventions of expression and a set of meanings, it can take diverse forms under influence of external factors. Those factors can be called "social reality" that consists of such qualities as: social goods, social structure, economic structure and mechanics of social stratification (Bernstein, 1972, p. 46). Together they form a system, used by people located on different levels in the ladder of social stratification. Content and range of expression language may vary throughout the social ladder. Consequently there are distinctive social codes within selected social groups (Bernstein, 1964). Those codes also reveal a person's sense of individuality, system of values and individual sense of freedom of thoughts (Bernstein, 1972, p. 136).

Bernstein divides codes into two extreme forms: restricted and elaborated. The restricted form is recognised by such features as: poor vocabulary enclosed in short and precise statements, with predictable syntax and easy to decode content (Ibidem, pp.136-137). It is worth noting that the content is easy to decode within a community with strong social bounds. The restricted code, based on short and easy to understand statements, is used to communicate maximum content with minimum number of words. For people who communicate with restricted code, words are used to be very saturated with symbolical meaning. That assures effectiveness of communication and maintenance of social bound between the members with similar worldviews or values.

An elaborated code can be recognised by: rich vocabulary and inaccurate statements with unpredictable and tough to decode content (Ibidem, pp.138-139). Elaborated code, because of the tough and slow encoding and also complex grammatical and stylistic constructions, is used only for individual expressions and for highlighting one's worldview independence, when the meanings, symbols and values are in the negotiation process.

Important research in this topic, were conducted by Raqayina Hasan (Hasan, 2005, 2009, 2011). Results pointed out that employees with high levels of autonomy in work (scientists, writers, directors, chairmen etc.) are more often and more likely to use elaborated code, because it is a practical manifestation of their worldview and values in which they personally believe (openness, freedom, creativity, independence, individuality etc.).

Language code is shaped as an effect of primary and secondary socialisation. The type of code, which will dominate from the beginning in the persons communication processes, will be more likely used in different social situations, both in private and public spheres (Bernstein, 1972, p.111). Also affiliation to social class or social stratum strengthens the tendencies in usage of types of codes.

## ACADEMIC WORLD AND LANGUAGE CODE

In the European tradition, one of the most important stages of education is higher education (Goćkowski, 1999: pp.43-49). From a historical perspective uni-

versities in Europe were an important habitat for intellectual activity (Goćkowski, 1999; Gola 2007, Brzezinski 2009). They gathered outstanding individuals in the world of science, in order to create social elites and socially useful knowledge. The analyses conducted by Ralph Dahrendorf (Dahrendorf, 1954), Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, Passeron 1990), or Randall Collins (Collins 1979, 2004), showed that universities as institutions are representing the interests of the higher strata of society, in the context of linguistic activity, were (or are) the institutions of social reproduction, also from language perspective. The following thesis can be stated on this basis: universities as institutions are gathering independently and creatively thinking individuals. Another possible assumption is that universities naturally represent, in terms of language, a zone in which the norm is the usage of elaborated code. In addition, the structure and values (freedom of thought, expression and research, individualism and diversity of worldviews) exhibited by the elaborated code, are not only practically manifested by researchers and academic teachers, but are inoculated in future generations in the process of social reproduction.

The focus of this study was directed on an act of language expression created by the students in the form of essay writing. The second important scope was pointed on, whether the type of code, used by the students, correlated with certain aspects of their (students) socio-cultural capital (i.e. family, place of residence etc.).

## METHODOLOGY

The study was focused on two objectives: diagnosis of the type of social language code of first-year students in free expression. It should be noted that research conditions were planned to encourage student to use the elaborated code. Afterwards, the diagnosed codes were compared with chosen elements of student social capital.

The last goal is important because there has not been any similar study conducted in Poland. Examples of similar studies, cited in this paper, refer to the Anglo-Saxon countries (Bernstein, Lawton, 1963; Poole, Field, 1972; Robinson 1972; Dayton 1996; Eckert 2000; Grusky 2001; Ash 2002; Bedisti 2004; Coulmas 2005). It is difficult to extrapolate results obtained in those countries to the Polish cultural context. The author concluded that examination of the phenomena in Polish context may be an interesting point for further comparative analyses.

The following question was the main research problem of this study: What kind of language code do first-year students use in free language expression? The hypothesis, which author has proposed, was: Students, due to the favourable environment (private sphere) and nature of the task (essay writing), will be more willing to use an elaborated code than a restricted code.

The author also found that the correlation analysis could be a valuable supplement in the analysis and interpretation of diagnosed types of codes used by the students, hence the second research problem formulated by the author: How does the type of code, used by the first year students, correlate with the students socio-cultural capital?

The above-formulated research problems were supplemented by two more specific issues:

- What types of language codes were expressed by the first-year students of SDG (Sociology of Dispositional Groups)?
- What types of language codes were more popular among first-year students of SDG and why?

Variables diagnosed as a linguistic code used by the students, were correlated with socio-cultural capital variables such as:

- Age; hypothesis: the older the respondent the more likely, due to the experience and richer vocabulary resources, he/she will use the elaborated code more likely than restricted code;
- - Gender; hypothesis: as a result of socialization, men are taught to formulate and express concise thoughts, while women have cultural permission for extensive linguistic expression, women should therefore prefer to use the elaborated code and men should prefer to use the restricted code;
- Place of residence before the studies; hypothesis: the greater the diversity of socio-cultural contacts (which are more possible in larger habitats of people), the communications experience and vocabulary resources should be richer; thus people who live in larger towns would more likely apply elaborated code, while those from small habitats should be more willing to use restricted code;
- Education of parents; hypothesis: parents' education may translate into the quality of personal contact between the parents and the child; thus the higher the education level of the parents of the child, the better the contact they should have with each other, and this can result in a reinforced tendency to freer (more developed) expression of language (confirmed by R. Hasan);
- Average grade (last semester of studies); hypothesis: the academic world, despite rapid changes, favours individual development and encourages independent and critical thinking, students who are able to fully exploit the educational potential of the Academy should feel more freely in language expression, thus should be more willing to apply the elaborated code;
- Second field of studies (name and type of the other universities); hypothesis: a richer educational experience can lead to richer language experiences in the form of greater variety of read content, it can encourage a more complex and more individual language expression in certain situations, so students studying two (or more) fields of studies may prefer to use elaborated code;

## RESEARCH SUBJECTS

the research sample was composed of first year students, who were studying "Sociology of Dispositional Group" (SDG). The selection of group for research was dictated by several factors. Students of SDG were an interesting object of study because they represent a completely new profile of education in the field of sociology. This specialization combines extensive studies in the social sciences (which theoretically form the ability to freely use the elaborated language code) and professional preparation for service in the uniformed formations (in which the dominant code is the restricted one). It is worth noting that to study the afore-

mentioned speciality students with special features for whom such things as discipline, obedience, social hierarchy, efficient communication, precision of actions and thoughts are attractive (Maciejewski, 1998)

The sample consisted of 50 students of Sociology of Dispositional Groups. The entire population in this field of study counted 142 students. Therefore the author obtained research material at  $P = 35\%$  students. This study is a case study, representativeness of the sample for the correlation analysis was, estimated at 0.113 ( $\alpha = 0.03$ ). In view of the chosen year of studies and the chosen field of study, the sample should be classified as intentional.

## METHOD

In the study quantitative content analysis has been used to diagnose content produced by the students (the contents of a text created in Microsoft Office Word, limit to 2500 characters - no spaces - on the topic proposed by the researcher). The author concluded that the document produced in MS Word is more readable and at the current time in academic education, more natural in preparation (due to the high degree of computerization of the current generation of students) for students. The students created the text at home and send it to an e-mail address, indicated by the researcher. The documents after downloading were reviewed by the researcher and after formal verification of the data (whether the questionnaire had been filled-up correctly) and formatted text (remove unnecessary space, unification of the font(type and size) - the document was saved in .doc format. without further changes. After completion of the study, the mailbox together with the materials and data of the participants was removed.

The authors considered creation of texts at home more comfortable for students and it meant that texts were sent only by students who felt that they wanted to speak on the indicated topic.

The calculations were aimed at obtaining data on:

1. The number of words used in written statements; (the higher the number of words used in the written statement the longer the particular statement, a feature of elaborated code is that expressions are rich in statements);
2. Unique words used in written statements; (greater number of words used in the written statement means richer vocabulary was used by the person, and the use of the rich resources of the vocabulary is a feature of an elaborated code);
3. The numbers of adjectives and adverbs used in the written statement; (the larger the number of adjectives and adverbs in the submission, the more the speech is descriptive, and this is another distinctive feature of elaborated code);
4. The quantity of simple sentences used in the written statement; (feature of restricted code is the advantage of number of simple sentences over the complex sentences);
5. The amount of complex sentences used in the written statements; (feature of elaborated code is the advantage of number of complex sentences over simple sentences);

With the above indicators it was possible to calculate the percentage of:

- a. The total number of unique words in the total number of words used in the text - an indicator of wealth of vocabulary (the higher the number, the richer vocabulary) and an indicator of the type of code (the richer vocabulary the code more elaborated);
- b. The number of complex sentences in the total number of sentences - an indicator of the type of code (the higher the number of complex sentences the more the code was elaborated);
- c. adjectives and adverbs in the number of words - an indicator of the type of code (the higher the percentage the more elaborated code);

## RESULTS – CODE DIAGNOSIS

Conducted analysis had resulted in the diagnose of the three types of codes (Table 1.);

**Table 1.** Registered types of codes

Type of code	Quantity (n)
Moderately restricted (m-R)	15
Mixed (M)	28
Moderately elaborated (m-E)	7
Summary	n=50

Source: Own research.

In the tested research we specified three basic types of codes: restricted, mixed and elaborated code. Each type of code has been singled out on the basis of quantitative analysis, focused on examination of the contents. Indicators of codes were described in the research methods section of this article. Based on the results, which took into account the best and worst results, we created for each indicator, five-step scale intervals. Each student's written expression was classified on the basis of the aforementioned scale.

The analyzed data revealed that the most popular type of code was the mixed code, which is a central, 3rd degree in the scale. Then, the second most numerous was the restricted code, in the moderate version, being 2nd degree of the scale. The third and the least numerous code was the elaborated one, in the moderate version, which is a 4 degree scale. Preliminary analysis shows that none of the students used the clean (kind of ideal type) restricted or elaborated code.

## STRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION

The fact that students more often used the mixed code or moderately restricted one, may be explained by the fact that in the course of primary socialization (family environment) and in the course of secondary socialization (school, place of residence), these codes are more common in situation of formal contact. On the

ground of universities (the task given by a representative of the academic world) means that they automatically adopt more formal language of communication. Although the high number of mixed codes, indicates that the domestic nature of the task, encouraged them to combine styles of two codes: elaborated (private area) and restricted (formal context on the task).

## FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATION

There is also a possibility that codes used by the students were only a response to a current situation. It could be postulated that a large group of students who applied a mixed code found that the task put before them was on the border of two different linguistic expression, the same for both formal and informal situations. On the one hand, the limited conditions of expression (subject matter, scope of statement, time to create statements) mobilized them to use a restricted code. On the other hand (home environment, freedom in delivering opinions and anonymity) gave the space for open expression of views and ideas, identical to the elaborated code.

A large number of restricted statements can be explained by the attitude of the students, who may treated the language expression as a professional task. Short, concise style of speech with simple grammatical and stylistic design linked those written statements to:

- instant message monologues, which are conducted on the Internet;
- Concise and specialistic content of speech, characteristic for an expert in a given field of knowledge;
- Monologue of a person who is not concerned in the task or the topic, who is writing only due to the courtesy for the researcher, decided to send his statement in the form more restricted;

The desire to use the elaborated code by few students was on one hand predictable because these students are only at the beginning of academic training. They are involved in the new technology of education directed towards them. However, on the other hand, those few students, who used more elaboratd code, may have some unique language features, which should be more fully examined in the future.

## RESULTS – CORRELATIONS

In the correlation analysis<sup>12</sup> there have been compiled types of codes used by students with the different parts of their socio-cultural profile of the students ie. age, gender, studying in another field of study, parents' education, origin (city, village) and the average score of the last semester of studies (although in this case was the grade at the end of secondary school). The results of the correlations have been enmassed by the author in table 2.

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In the calculation process, author had used SPSS18 programme.

**Table 2.** Correlations results (significance <0.05)

Variable	Strength of correlation			Type of correlation	Significance		
	P	K	S		P	K	S
Gender	-0.24	-0.26	-0.27	Negative	low	low	low
Age	-0.12	-0.16	-0.18	Negative	low	low	low
Habitat	0.13	0.09	0.10	Positive	low	low	low
Parents education level	0.13	0.15	0.17	Positive	low	low	low
Average grade	0.49	0.43	0.49	Positive	med	med	med

Source: Own research

In the perspective of gender (Table 3) much of research probe was composed of women (37 subjects), the others were male (13 subjects). This was therefore an unbalanced group, thus any comparison relating to the use of language codes, and gender of respondents were undesirable and unreliable. The analysis revealed a negative correlation: Person= -0.24, Kendall= -0.26, Spearman= -0.27; this relationship is negligible due to insufficient strength of the relationship between variables; also irrelevant for the lack of the necessary symmetry in the distribution of gender within the research probe.

**Table 3.** The gender distribution in the research sample

Gender	Quantity (n)	Statistical value
Males	13	0
Females	37	1
Total	n=50	

Source: Own research

Age of the participants in the study (Table 4) was measured on the basis of their year of birth. The range of age clarified in the range between 1991 - 1996 year. The largest group (32 people) represented 1995 as year of birth (20 years). The second most numerous were born in 1994 (10 persons aged 21 years). The third age group, in terms of numbers was the year 1993 (6 persons, aged 22 years). Among the respondents, there was one person born in 1991 (23 years) and one in 1996 (19 years old). The group was unbalanced in the perspective of age, but because of large internal diversity was a valuable source of analysis. The analysis revealed a negative correlation, at strength: Pearson = -0.12, Kendall = -0.16, Spearman = -0.18 indicating a small strength of the relationship between variables;

**Table 4.** Age distribution in the research sample

Date of birth	Quantity (n)
1991	1
1993	6
1994	10
1995	32
1996	1
Total	n=50

Source: Own research

Analysis of the place of origin (Table 5) revealed that the largest portion of respondents -16 persons, comes from areas classified in demographic typologies, as a large city or metropolis. The second largest group were the persons who are the representatives of the country - 14 respondents. The third group in terms of numbers were those from medium-sized cities - 12 respondents. In contrast, the least numerous was a group of small cities and towns - 8 responders. Analysis of the origin of the subjects revealed wide variation in this matter and it represented an important variable for further research correlation. Statistical analysis revealed a positive correlation: Pearson= 0.13, Kendall= 0.09, Spearman= 0.10; indicating a small strength of the relationship between variables;

**Table 5.** Distribution of places of residence in the research sample

Place of residence (population in thousands)	Quantity (n)
Large habitat (more than 100<)	16
Medium habitat (less than 100)	12
Small habitat (less than 10)	8
Country	14
Total	50

Source: Own research

Diagnosis directed at obtaining information on the quality of education of parents (Table 6) of the surveyed people, revealed that the largest number of parents had secondary education - 59 persons; 13 people had basic vocational education, 12 people had Master's degree; 11 persons had finished primary education; 6 people among the parents were university students with doctoral degree or higher. Calculated correlation between parental education and the type of code used by the student, revealed a positive relationship: Pearson= 0.13, Kendall= 0,15, Spearman= 0,17; indicating a low strength of the relationship between the juxtaposed variables.

**Table 6.** Educational level of parents of students.

Parents (education)	Potential	Male	Female	Maximum potential
Primary	0	0	0	2
Vocational education	13	4	9	0
Secondary education	59	29	30	29
Licentiate	11	6	5	5
Master	12	9	3	10
PhD or higher	5	2	3	4
Total	100	50	50	50

Source: Own research.

Data on the average grades of the last six months of school, revealed that the largest number of students - 16 people graduated from high school, had an average grade of 3; 13 people reported an average grade of 4; 11 people reported an average grade conjunction of 4.5; 8 people reported an average grade of 3.5 and 2 people had an average grade of 5. The analysis showed a significant positive

correlation of strength: Pearson= 0.49, Kendall= 0.43, Spearman= 0,49; among the examined variables. This result may indicate that students who use, during the studies elaborated code, can obtain higher scores, in the perspective of academic education. However, this trend due to the limited number of cases, should be treated with great caution. Extrapolation of this result on other students groups or fields of study should not take place.

**Table 7.** Average grade profile of students.

Grade	Quantity (n)	Average	Median
3	16	3,75	4
3,5	8		
4	13		
4,5	11		
5	2		

Source: Own research.

To ensure that indicators and variables can be treated as a effective tool in the process of presented study, all chosen variables had been tested with Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test (CAT). The test indicated that the alpha score only for Cronbach's Alpha was: 0,608 and for Standarized Items was: 0,836. The result can be considered moderate. Therefore the research tool can be treated as acceptable.

### REJECTED VARIABLE

After analyzing the questionnaires, the researcher found that none of the surveyed students did not attend, nor did he complete a second course of study. This variable was therefore rejected by the author as impossible for any fair analysis and interpretation

### CONCLUSIONS

Students in the situation of free language expression often used mixed or restricted code. The reason for this may be the current evolutionary trends in the academic world, which becomes a space for vocational and professional exchange of information (Domaradzki, 1999, pp.16-17). In that communication efficiency is the most important. Fast, short and clearly enunciated messages are preferred. It must be remembered that universities in Poland (and not only there) since the late 90s, are seen as mass education institutions (Hejwosz, 2008, pp.47-49). Universities are recruiting candidates in many groups and social classes. Thus, increasingly have to deal with students from different social backgrounds with very different cultural capitals. Mixed code and especially restricted code are simple and effective forms of exchange of ideas, but also can form social bonds between individuals, scholars, students and university administrators, giving them a common symbolic field of interaction.

Another interpretation may indicate a re-evaluation of the standards when recruiting candidates for studies (Dybaś 2006, p.78). during which the emphasis is not placed on such elements of candidates profiles as linguistic capital or freedom of expression , oral and written alone, but only matriculation examination. Adding to the nature of the academic community (values exemplified by the elaborated code), born from the need to develop an effective platform for mutual understanding, which perfectly meets the simple restricted code.

However, due to the limited scope of the study (50 students), the present study can be classified only as a case study. Further studies are needed to be able to talk about some macro-structural trends. The results obtained on the basis of this social group, are representative only for this group and there is need to carefully extrapolate any conclusions to other potential groups (especially students of other faculties). Especially when the study was focused on a completely new field of study.

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