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VI. MOKSLINIO GYVENIMO KRONIKA / KRONIKA ŻYCIA NAUKOWEGO

Konferencijų apžvalgos / Konferencje

OPENING NEW PATHS FOR SCIENTIFIC DISCUSSION: AN OVERVIEW OF THE 9th INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE “MAN IN THE SPACE OF LANGUAGE”

Jūratė Radavičiūtė
(Lietuva / Lithuania)

On 12th–13th May, 2016, the 9th international scientific conference “Man in the Space of Language”, organised by the Department of Foreign Languages, Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Vilnius University, was held. Scholars from Norway, the UK, Russia, Latvia, the UAE, Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Georgia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Kazakhstan contributed their research to the discussion initiated by the scientific committee of the conference on the topics of conceptual metaphors, political discourse, new media texts and culture, the paradigm of cultural memory and foreign language teaching in the global context.

The conference opened with a plenary session in which Professor Naomi Segal from the University of London (UK) elaborated on the topics of cultural literacy and gender of translation; Professor Veronika Razumovskaja from Siberian Federal University (Russia) provided her insight on the issue of cultural memory with the view on the application of translation strategies; and dr. Oleksandr Kapranov from Bergen University discussed conceptual metaphors in corporate discourse by British Petroleum and Shell, involving renewable energy.

As the conference aims at initiating further cooperation between scholars, the speech by Professor Naomi Segal on the concept of cultural literacy offered ideas for future scientific collaboration in the field of humanities. Prof. Segal provided some background of the concept by pointing out that in October 2007, the ESF Standing Committee for the Humanities raised concerns about what was happening in and to the literary studies. As a field it seemed to be difficult to recognise and support. Over the next 18 months, through a variety of international networking activities, a momentum developed to redefine and name the areas in which literary scholars work and focus on new ways to impact European society. Under the concept of cultural literacy, the initiative aims at bringing to light the specificity of literary studies, now redefined as literary and cultural studies and see what it is capable of. The concept of cultural literacy has recently been approved by the European Commission and included among the topics for further scientific research in the programme Horizon 2020.

After the plenary session, the participants of the conference continued scientific discussion in parallel workshops in Russian, Lithuanian and English languages. In the

workshop “New Approaches to Language Teaching“, the keynote speaker for this session Loreta Vaicekauskiene (Lithuania) spoke about the problem of student literacy presenting a different approach to the issue raised. The speaker asserted that the research on the literacy of Lithuanian schoolchildren shows that their level of literacy has not changed significantly over the years, however, mass media reaction, fuelled by the results of the Lithuanian state examination, imposes an opposite point of view. Loreta Vaicekauskiene suggested that the results might be due to the change of evaluation criteria rather than the overall level of literacy of students. The presentation provoked a heated discussion among the audience which included not only scientists but also school teachers and university students.

Another keynote speaker in the workshop, Peter Hassall (UEA) introduced his project “The Extremely Short Story Competition” which is organised within the theoretical framework of Global Englishes. The competition has become global, involving participants from Asia and Europe; students of Kaunas Faculty of Humanities participated in the competition in 2014 and made their contribution to the research done on the basis of students’ works. The collaboration between Zayed University (UEA) and Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, Vilnius University (Lithuania) has been active since 2014; activities include long-term visits by university professors, participation in conferences with joint reports and other initiatives. The speech by Peter Hassall, which presented the results of a joined research, is an important contribution to further the collaboration between the educational institutions.

The discussion about new trends in the field of linguistic and literary research was conducted in Russian and English languages on both days of the conference. Among different topics, the discussion of cultural memory and new media texts in different societies appeared to be among the most relevant issues covered by the presentations of Alla Diomidova (Lithuania) on the linguistic landscape of Tbilisi; Nina Kozlovceva (Russia) who spoke about the significance of Celtic words in the context of cultural memory in UK and Tatjana Bobko (Belarus) who discussed the bilingual Internet environment of Belarus. The presentation of Tatjana Bobko sparked a lot of interest due to the linguistic situation in Belarus, where two official languages Belorussian and Russian exist, the later of which holds a dominant position. The research presented in the conference addressed the issue of inequality in terms of the usage of two languages in informal public discourse as well as their role and functions in the process of communication.

Postcolonial studies were mainly discussed by scholars in the field of literary research: Natalija Lichomanova, Yaroslava Sazonova (Ukraine) and Nana Gaprindashvili (Georgia) whose presentations reflected the postcolonial narrative in general and contemporary literary narratives in Ukraine and Georgia. The research presented in the conference provided an interesting insight into the application of post-colonial literary theory to the literature of post-Soviet countries. The approach is debatable, for conflicting opinions exist about the term *post-colonial* used in connection to post-Soviet literature. However, an increasing interest in the application of the theoretical framework to the analysis of such texts proves the relevance of such scientific investigation.

Another important field of research included investigations within the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphors. The presentations on the mechanism of metaphors included presentations by Elena Jurchuk (Ukraine), Vera Barbaziuk (Russia), Vera Pustovalova (Ukraine), Marija Jasinskaja (Russia), Dovile Vengaliene (Lithuania), Olga Shesterikova (Russia), Veronika Girininkaitė (Lithuania) and a number of others. The research in the field of conceptual metaphors embraced a wide range of analysis' objects from literary discourse to advertisements and newspaper headlines. Olga Shesterikova discussed the process of metaphorisation of the poetic language in Russia in the 20th century, focusing on the analysis of literary works by Mandelstam and Brodsky. Vera Barbaziuk explored the specificity of the concept *life* in the Russian language, while Dovile Vengaliene presented a research on the verbal and visual modes of metaphors in outdoor advertisements.

Political discourse as an object of scientific research was discussed in parallel sections in all three languages of the conference. Egle Gabrenaite (Lithuania) and Olga Volfovskaha (Ukraine) presented a more general overview on the elements of political rhetoric. More specific case studies of political discourses were presented by Vilma Linkeviciute (Lithuania) who analysed conflict communication discourse of Valdas Adamkus; and Noni Kamenova (Bulgaria) who talked about public discourses of identity in educational reforms in Bulgaria.

It is important to mention that activities in the international scientific conference "Man in the Space of Language" were not restricted to the participation in academic discussions in the organised plenary and parallel sessions. During the conference, Larisa Kaminskaja and Nana Gaprindashvili, the representatives of Sankt-Petersburg State University (Russia) and Ivane Javakhishvili from Tbilisi State University (Georgia) had meetings with Kestutis Driaunys, the Dean of Kaunas Faculty of Humanities, to discuss possibilities of future cooperation between institutions.

In the closing event of the conference, guests expressed their appreciation for the event and encouraged the Department of Foreign Languages to organise the conference every year. The organisers of the event hope that the 10th international scientific conference "Man in the Space of Language", which is planned in 2018, will provide more opportunities for scholars doing research in the field of humanities to meet and discuss their research as well as initiate new ways of collaboration between individual scholars and institutions.