

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NOTION OF PRAGMATIC EQUIVALENCE

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Abstract: The development of pragmatics, on the one hand, and contrastive linguistics on the other led inevitably to the issue of contrasting pragmatic phenomena. Some works (Riley, 1979; Oleksy, 1980; Kalisz, 1981; Janicki, 1985) discussed the notion of pragmatic equivalence. The phenomena considered susceptible for comparison were speech acts and perlocutionary effects. I propose the following definition of pragmatic equivalence: $X1L1$ and $X2L2$ (i.e. an expression in one language and an expression in another language) are semanto-pragmatically equivalent if and only if they exhibit maximally similar implicatures. A scalar version of the definition and some auxiliary notions are provided in the paper.

Keywords: pragmatic equivalence, generative grammar, congruence, illocutionary acts, perlocutionary effects, implicatures

1. THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE NOTION.

The last Contrastive Conference took place in Świeradów in December 1995. It terminated Polish-English Contrastive Project, which stimulated many linguists over more than a quarter of our century. Most likely, a new, cross-cultural linguistic project will be launched, however, the old project will leave some nostalgic feelings among those who were involved in it and for whom contrastive conferences were most important linguistic and social events. Among numerous achievements of the Polish-English Project I would like to mention theoretical notions stemming from contrastive research such as correspondence, comparability, tertium comparationis, congruence, equivalence and others developed mainly by (Krzeszowski, 1967; 1974; 1986; 1989) but also by (Marton, 1968; Bouton, 1976) and others, including myself. An increased

interest in linguistic pragmatics throughout the last twenty five years or so led inevitably to questions referring to contrasting pragmatic phenomena.

The first works considering theoretical issues of contrastive pragmatics (Zimmerman, 1972; Bublitz, 1978; Riley, 1979; Oleksy, 1980; Kalisz, 1981) did not achieve great recognition because as (Fisiak, 1983) stated after Fillmore there had not been any agreement among linguists with respect to accounts of the field, its delimitation or a single universal convincing example that the field of pragmatics exists. Further, Fisiak also claimed that the field of contrastive pragmatics had a great potential and should be developed on par with other linguistic fields and domains in order to understand language use and its forms. Sixteen years have passed since such claims were popular. Today, even if we do not agree with delimitation of pragmatics it is possible to refer to pragmatic tradition stemming from studies of Austin, Searle, Grice, Leech, Levinson, Brown, Sperber, Wilson and others. Theories of speech acts, conversational implicatures, relevance or face theory, among others, are very well known. They are exploited and developed today. After the publication of (Levinson's 1983) book on pragmatics there seems to be less confusion with respect to prototypical pragmatic problems (although Levinson does not use such a term, I mean *prototypical*). Nevertheless, some notorious problems such as separation of semantics from pragmatics, on the one hand, and sociolinguistics, on the other, remain. According to my theoretical stance following general ideas of cognitive linguists such distinctions are not only unnecessary but also detrimental to linguistic theory: semantics without pragmatics leads to paradoxes such as referential opacity or intensionality while pragmatics alone is not able to show many meaningful relations between form and content (e.g. Kalisz, 1986; 1988 or 1993) unless we have to do with a version of radical pragmatics which leaves only some combinational properties for semantics where the majority of problems connected with meaning is to be considered by pragmatics.

Let us, however, come back to earlier days of the development of contrastive linguistics. The first works already mentioned above (especially Riley, 1979; Oleksy, 1980 and Fillmore, 1982) are of programmatic character. Riley presents a wide research program embracing formal, illocutionary and interactional structures. Interactional structure comes from Birmingham School of Discourse developed by Brazil, Coulthard and Sinclair. It is hierarchical and has several levels such as act, move, exchange and transaction. This wide program is very interesting but not economical since it comprises two sets of terms i.e. interactional and illocutionary which involve such terms as request request for information etc. (Riley, 1979) program has other drawbacks such as lack of contextual conditioning of utterances which very often eliminate illocutionary force ambiguity or vagueness. (Fillmore, 1982) similar programmatic paper postulates a way of carrying out contrastive pragmatic studies showing how to work with texts and native speaker informants. He also presents a contrastive analysis of German pragmatic particles doch, namlich and ja and their English counterparts.

(Oleksy's, 1980; 1984) article which involves attempts of formulation of the notion of pragmatic equivalence is more interesting from theoretical point of view. It opens a discussion in which part is taken by (Janicki, 1985) once and Krzeszowski and Kalisz several times.

Oleksy's definition (1984: 360) goes as follows:

- (1) A linguistic utterance X1L1 is pragmatically equivalent to X2L2 where both X1 and X2 can be used for the performance of the same act relative to the

corresponding set of pragmatic, contextual and socio-cultural factors, where X1L1 is an expression in one language, and X2L2 is an expression in another language.

Later Oleksy changes the expression 'the same' for 'maximally similar'. An identity or maximal similarity of speech acts does not exhaust Oleksy's program which includes also three more components apart from the pragmato-contrastive one (i.e. semanto-syntactic, pragmatic and interactional). Correspondence of such acts is, however, fundamental for pragmatic equivalence.

A different account of the problem is given in (my 1981) work where maximal similarity of perlocutionary effects in L1 and L2 is the factor determining equivalence. *Congruence* which was an important notion in (Marton, 1968) and (Krzeszowski, 1967) became a spurious notion in generative semantics based (Krzeszowski's, 1974; 1979) Contrastive Generative Grammar (CGG) where X1L1 and X2L2 had to be congruent at some level of derivation and diversification would occur at various levels such as syntactic or lexical. When grammar is conceived as non-derivational the problem of congruence reappears. In (my 1981) account X1L1 and X2L2 are congruent if (and only if) semantic, pragmatic and syntactic features match (to the maximal extent). Phonological properties are not relevant here since we have to do with two different languages, however they may be relevant here in translating such poems as 'Bells'. So conceived congruence differed from proposals by Krzeszowski and Marton who treated structures as congruent where X1L1 had the same number of words and the words in sequence were translations of respective words in the other language. e.g.

(2) Mary and Susan are Martians

Maria i Zuzanna są * Marsjanie/Marsjankami

The above utterances are not congruent in my account since non-viral gender and instrumental case are transparent in Polish and non-existent in English. My congruent utterances would be such that would not involve negative transfer:

(3) John and Mary live in Chicago.

Jan i Maria mieszkają w Chicago.

No properties seem to be present in one utterance but not in the other. So conceived congruence is more rare than in the case of (Krzeszowski, 1967 or Marton, 1968) notion of congruence. However, translating word by word we always receive a positive result since semantic, pragmatic and syntactic properties are balanced. So although congruence in my account seems to be more rare, it has additional value of safe translatability.

Let us come back, however, to pragmatic equivalence. Krzeszowski on several occasions (1986; 1989) criticises both Oleksy's and my account of pragmatic equivalence. It has to be noted, however, that major theoretical position which Krzeszowski seemed to hold was mainly responsible for such attack. Krzeszowski in his earlier works from CGG times treated semanto-syntax as one component in accordance with generative semantic tradition. Pragmatics was an unclear non-linguistic discipline connected in some way with context. It is slightly strange that together with acceptance of principles of cognitive linguistics he did not abandon the semanto-syntax-pragmatics dichotomy because there is no clear cut distinction between semantics and pragmatics in cognitive framework, as he himself notes quoting Langacker. I believe that at least some of the objections would be lifted by professor Krzeszowski today. Let us return, however, to history and quote the following (Krzeszowski's, 1989: 65-66) statement: ' All attempts to treat pragmatics on par with other levels of linguistic analysis seem to me fundamentally erroneous and ill begotten for the following reasons:

1. In the structuralist and generative tradition pragmatics was not recognised as a “level” or “component” like phonology or syntax or even semantics, which were autonomous, isolated modules interrelated through various rules (projective, transformational, morphophonological). Such models simply do not accommodate pragmatics, considering its scope to be outside the domain of what they claimed to be competence and relegating it to the domain of performance i.e. the area outside the scope of linguistic theory.

This objection may be maintained with great difficulty by objectivist approach to language and cognition. Modular approach is alien to cognitive linguistics. Apart from competence we have such terms as communicative competence formulated by (Del Hymes, 1972). However, it is not entirely true that in objectivist tradition pragmatics was never on par with semantics or syntax. Consider (Morri's, 1938) distinction into three linguistic disciplines: syntax-relation between or among linguistic signs, semantics-relation between a linguistic sign and extralinguistic reality and pragmatics-relation between a linguistic sign and its users. The idea of preservation of competence of Chomsky's type at all costs, disregarding obvious linguistic facts, has been present in quite a few accounts (c.f. Kempson, 1977). I maintain that cognitively based tradition renders this objection irrelevant.

2. CS based on such models yielded and explicated the concepts of congruence, equivalence and contrastive generative grammar. Such CS do not embrace the domain of pragmatics for want of theoretical and procedural equipment ultimately adopted from structuralist-generative model of thinking.

This objection again refers to theoretical preferences. CS do not have to be based on generative tradition, hence adopted from the structuralist-generative model of thinking. Congruence, equivalence can be easily determined with functional or cognitive linguistics framework. (Krzeszowski, 1986) himself proposes such analyses (e.g. *over* vs *(po) nad*). Moreover, if congruence/equivalence were only generativist-structuralist traditions then they should be spurious in other non-generative, non-structural frameworks.

I will not analyse objections 3 and 4, which are in the similar vain e.g. 4. Any attempt to extrapolate concepts employed in CS based on generative grammar into domain of pragmatics is a methodological error leading to an impossible endeavour to construct a generative grammar of performance. However, I will consider the final objection which maintains, that any attempt to define pragmatic equivalence in abstraction from the concept of optimum translation leads to an undesirable proliferation of concepts which do not reflect any empirically verifiable reality and as such should be abandoned in pursuits with purport to be scientific.

I am afraid that it is rather the concept of *optimum translation*, which is not empirically verifiable and as such should be abandoned in pursuit to be scientific. The argument is simple: who is to judge whether we have to do with optimal translation or not. Let us take Shakespearian *To be or not to be that is the question?*: It was translated as *Być albo nie być oto jest pytanie? Być czy też nie być oto jest pytanie?* I would translate as *Być czy nie być oto jest pytanie?* And it will be very hard for anyone to convince me that it is not the optimal translation. Translation is an art not a scientific endeavour. There can also be more than one optimal translation depending priorities or preferences of translator or on goals of translation. Equivalence, on the other hand, can specify concrete properties, even pragmatic, which are or are not exhibited by particular expressions in two or more different languages.

For (Krzeszowski, 1989) pragmatics is present in all components from phonology to semantics. This reminds me of a structural cake where there were three layers of cake-

phonology, morphology and syntax and cream poured over the three layers, namely, semantics. Krzeszowski accommodates semantics to the cake leaving the role of semantics to pragmatics. Hence, pragmatics is a contextual magma, which is not susceptible to description with some vigour. This is not, however, true since we have at least four significant theories i.e. theory of illocutionary acts, theory of conversational implicature, theory of relevance or face theory. Those theories have significant achievements not smaller than semantic theories, hence a clause that we need theoretical not procedural equipment is misplaced even if we follow structuralist-generative tradition.

Krzeszowski's own suggestions refer to three parameters (type of act, modality and intended perlocutionary effect) as basic for PE. I discuss his 1986 characterisation in my paper of 1986 concluding that intended perlocutionary effect is essential for characterisation of similarity of acts where the values of the other two do not secure pragmatic equivalence. I am surprised that his 1989 characterisation is within generative framework to which he has not come back, to my knowledge. Once again, semantics is together with pragmatics in cognitive linguistics. In generative tradition from (Chomsky 1965) there are no semanto-syntactic structures.

2. PRAGMATIC EQUIVALENCE AND IMPLICATURE

Already (in 1986) I proposed that more productive approach to equivalence of pragmatic phenomena would come from conversational implicature theory rather than from speech act theory. (Grice's, 1967) theory renders comparison within one language with respect to indirectness of conveyed meaning. It may be claimed that two utterances are pragmatically equivalent if and only if they exhibit maximally similar implicatures. An implicature may be conventional in L1 and conversational in L2. The requirement is that their conveyed meanings are maximally similar. Thus, the famous *It's cold in here* and *Zamknij drzwi* may be pragmatically equivalent expressions provided that the contextual determinants allow for deriving maximally similar implicature. Nevertheless, any equivalence is a matter of degree. If so, then some criteria and auxiliary notions are necessary in determining in relative terms the degree of equivalence. Here I find (Krzeszowski's, 1986) concept of prototypical equivalence illuminating. With (my 1986) amendment it goes as follows:

Linguistic phenomena have more or less prototypical equivalents in other languages only when for a phenomenon in L1 there is a commonly attested phenomenon in L2 matching to a high degree the prototypical properties established for the phenomenon L2.

Let us explore this idea:

11. Close the door!
12. Zamknij drzwi!
13. Zimno tu.
14. Syberia.
15. Moje korzonki.
16. Zrób coś.

(12) would be the most prototypical pragmatic (and overall equivalent for that matter) of (11) since the conveyed meaning in both (11) and (12) is derived by means of conventional implicature. 13-16 are non-prototypical equivalents of 11 since different kinds of implicatures and proper contextual circumstances are needed in order to derive the corresponding interpretation.

Obviously 17

17. It's cold in here!

Is a prototypical equivalent of 13 sharing illocutionary force indeterminacy when taken out of context and requiring very similar conversational implicatures and contextual determinants to derive the conveyed meaning similar to 11 or 12.

In American English 18 is a routine call of a football referee to announce to the teams that one of them remains in possession of the ball and has successfully picked up the required amount of yardage and has four attempts to gain the next ten yards.

18. It's first and ten.

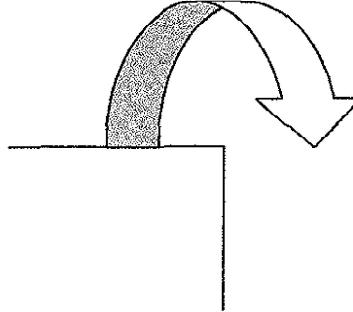
In Polish no prototypical equivalent can be found although the meaning and situation may be presented descriptively or peripherastically. This is because of the cultural differences, which appear in the domain of team games between American English and Polish.

Another example less connected with cultural differences can be found in (Krzeszowski, 1986).

19. He jumped over the cliff.

20. Skoczył w dół przez krawędź urwiska.

(Brugman, 1981) and (Lakoff, 1987) present the following image schema representing 19.



In Polish, neither the image nor its meaning is stabilised or entrenched in Langacker's terms. That is why I would like to claim that there is no prototypical equivalent of 19 in Polish in spite of that as in the previous case it is possible to convey such meaning descriptively.

In 1993 I revised my earlier position partly in view of attacks on the discipline of pragmatics stemming from misunderstandings (Janicki's, 1985) and partly for more genuine cognitive linguistics foundation of equivalence.

As is very well known semantics in cognitive linguistics is encyclopaedic in its nature (e.g. Haiman, 1980) and is inseparably connected with pragmatics. I mentioned earlier that pure semantic analysis may lead to paradoxes such as intensionality e.g.

Julius Caesar knew that Rome lies on the Tiber.

Rome = The Capital of the Popes then

Julius Caesar knew that the Capital of the Popes lies on the Tiber.

Pragmatics offers a natural explication of the problem connected with belief systems of participants in discourse and/or mental spaces (cf. Kalisz, 1988 or Faucounier, 1985).

Similarity, a pure pragmatic analysis is insufficient since conveyed meaning is a function of general principles of derivation of implicatures, context and lexical meanings of a given utterance. Thus, if I want to get an aspirin from my interlocutor I

can anticipate the understanding of my intention i.e. the possibility of derivation of conversational implicature by such utterances as *I have a headache* or *I think I am ill* but not by uttering *John likes Mary*, *Tomorrow is another day* (of course, when there is no special code between the speaker and the addressee). Such codes, however, are of little interest to general pragmatics. The conclusion is that both semantic and pragmatic aspects are needed for revealing contrastive analysis.

Let us rephrase the earlier definitions to the following effect:

Two expressions $X1L1$ and $X2L2$ in two languages are semanto-pragmatically equivalent if (and only if) they represent maximally similar implicatures.

Also a scalar version of the definition may be provided:

$X1L1$ and $X2L2$ are semanto-pragmatically equivalent to the degree to which their conveyed meanings carried by implicatures are similar.

I believe that the above definitions are better characterisations of the phenomena under consideration than previous accounts or sceptical positions. It is possible to show a mechanism of derivation of the majority of conversational implicatures (one of Grice's main criteria for establishing conversational implicatures was calculability i.e. possibility of reasoning showing derivation of conveyed meaning). Conventional implicatures pose even smaller problems. In scalar version it is possible to show to what extent a given expression in $L1$ is equivalent to the expression in $L2$ on the basis of similarity of semantic and pragmatic properties. Of course, Krzeszowski is right in his earlier formulations that some properties are more significant in the assessment of similarities and differences than other properties. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of semanto-pragmatic equivalence is possible showing various aspects of similarities and differences on the basis of concrete properties: such as lexical similarity, way of reasoning to derive an implicature, degree of conversationality of implicatures, politeness overtones, difficulty in processing, etc.

Hence, *It's cold in here* and *Zamknij drzwi* under proper contextual circumstances (The door in a room is open and it may be inferred that discomfort is caused by cold air through that door) are semanto-pragmatically equivalent, however, *Close the door* and *Zamknij drzwi* are more equivalent since the type of implicature, lexical and mood similarities are higher than in the case of the first pair.

3. CLOSING REMARKS

At present I have no doubt concerning possibility of formulation of theoretically plausible and practically applicable notion of semanto-pragmatic equivalence helpful in comparing phenomena in two or more languages. I would like to stress again that the notion of semanto-pragmatic equivalence makes more sense than solely pragmatic equivalence. What follows, is that we should contrast semanto-pragmatics of phenomena but not pragmatics separated in some artificial way from semantics. Grice's implicatures and the notions of prototype and family resemblance formulated (by Wittgenstein, 1957) constitute good foundations for using equivalence as a scalar notion. Notions of implicature, prototype and family resemblance inherently trigger comparison of phenomena within one language. A natural step is to employ those inherently contrastive tools for linguistic comparisons.

The notions are not trivial since they show how to compare semanto-pragmatic phenomena across languages. They also allow to show where and with respect to which properties two phenomena are similar or different. They do not exhaust, however, but only suggest parameters of comparison. Although Polish English Contrastive Project will have a new formula, still comparison of languages will exist

as long as humans exist. However, if no drastic reactions to my paper are met I will no longer deal with pragmatic or semanto-pragmatic equivalence in theoretical terms. Of course, other pragmatic theories could deliver notions for pragmatic comparison. For instance, two expressions could be treated as pragmatically equivalent if they would exhibit maximal degree of similarity with respect to optimal relevance. This characterisation, however, would be too general because it lacks in its formulation a concrete conveyed meaning. Hence, it is only pragmatic not a semanto-pragmatic statement.

(Sperber and Wilson's, 1986) relevance theory represents in my view an idealised system of human communication based on cool reasoning on the basis of premises and such modes of reasoning as *modus ponens* or *modus tollens*. Human decisions are purely rational based on calculation with respect to processing effort and significance of a premise with respect to contribution to context. People do not behave in this way very often. People take risks, sometimes a person is relevant and not his contribution to context etc. I think that their theory should be developed in a more human direction (Brown and Levinson's, 1987) face theory including the distinction of pragmatic utterances into face-threatening acts and non-threatening acts is a significant contribution to pragmatic theory. Hence, when we want something from somebody we find ourselves in a potentially unpleasant situation since we may meet with refusal, a put down or some other reaction, which may threaten our dignity. A face non-threatening act is, for instance, congratulating i.e. There is a situation, occasion or event favourable for the addressee we may without any risk issue an utterance representing congratulation.

I believe that face theory should be accommodated to contrastive pragmatics, especially in cases where it is important i.e. in directives, commissives and expressives. Assertives or declarations are rather immune to face considerations.

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