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Describing Cross-cultural Speech Behavior: a Communicative- Pragmatic Field Approach

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Abstract

The article aims to introduce a new methodology for contrastive description of speech acts patterns, such as WISH, ORDER, APOLOGY, PROMISE, etc. The proposed analysis is based on a new type of field, the communicative-pragmatic field, which can be used to describe linguistic realization of communicative behavior of interactants. The first part of the paper defines the place of the field in question among other types of fields, and describes the principles of the organization of the field as well as its structure and composition. The second part discusses main principles and peculiarities of the linguistic analysis based on the communicative-pragmatic field approach through the example of several speech acts.

Keywords: Linguistic pragmatics; speech act theory; field method; contrastive analysis

1. Contrastive pragmatics as a new direction in linguistics

Current linguistic research paradigms are characterized by being focused on anthropocentric and cross-disciplinary issues. Since the beginning of the 1970s, structural description of languages gave way to conducting multiparadigmatic research of practical communication and studying the conditions of using linguistic means by the speakers in intra- and intercultural communication. The new linguo-pragmatic direction of the analysis has been formed under the influence of linguo-philosophic (J. Austin, J. Searle, J. Habermas), semiotic (Ch. Morris, Ch. Peirce) and socio-pragmatic (S. Ervin-Tripp) ideas. At the early stage of its development, linguistic pragmatics was oriented towards identifying universal features of the communication process. The primary goals of that period

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included the description of the basic communication unit structure (i.e. of speech act), classification of speech acts, characterization of conditions required for successful speech act performance, etc. However, it has soon become clear that

- in different societies, and different communities, people speak differently;
- these differences in ways of speaking are profound and systematic (Wierzbicka 1991, p. 69).

Thus, we are now witnessing a move away from overwhelmingly monolingual and monocultural research paradigms to a type of research which finds its objectives in the multilingual and multicultural interaction of speakers from different national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds (Pütz & Neff-Aertselaer 2008). Comparative studies of communication and communication units can be conducted, on the one hand, as a part of studying the process of second language acquisition, on the other hand, as a part of contrastive linguistics.

The former focuses on the problems encountered by a second language speaker, describing major communication mistakes and explaining the nature of its origins. As a rule, data for the comparison comes from a native language and so called *interlanguage* – the language system(s) developed by the learner on his/her path to acquire the target language (non-native language) (Trosborg 1995, p. 53). During the last two decades interlanguage pragmatics has been developed intensively, a considerable number of languages being compared. The most significant contribution to the development of this trend was made by the project “Requests and Apologies: A Cross-Cultural Study of Speech Act Realization Patterns” (CCSARP). The aim of the project was to establish a database of speech act realizations, especially of requests and apologies, across (initially) eight different languages or language varieties (Australian English, American English, British English, Canadian French, Danish, German, Hebrew, Russian), to analyze the different communicative strategies across these languages and to pinpoint areas of pragmatic mismatches (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984, p. 197). The main results of the research activity carried out by the project group were published in 1981 (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper 1989). Within the project they developed a certain methodology for data collection and data analysis. The methodology has been widely applied in further research to other languages (French, Spanish, Persian, Korean, Japan, etc., see, for example, Eslamirasekh, 1992; Kim, 1995; Francis, 1997; Gass, & Houck, 1999; Félix-Brasdefer, 2009).

The second direction of comparative studies includes the pragmatic aspect into the general contrastive description of two or more languages. Contrastive analysis belongs to the priority trends of the modern linguistic research. It allows to identify similarities and differences between the compared languages, both structural and functional, which on top of everything else can further serve as a basis for typological generalizations. However, there can be witnessed a tendency to involve all the levels of language as well as the maximum number of linguistic phenomena in the comparison, which can hardly be established for each language pair. At the present time, we can state that one of the least explored linguistic areas is the communicative-pragmatic level. This has been highlighted by many linguists: “Kontrastive Analysen stehen dem Untersuchungsobjekt Text bzw. Diskurs immer noch zögernd gegenüber” (Gladrow, 2001, p. 389).

Contrastive analysis of a language pair can be summarized in developing its contrastive grammar. To date, there is a number of such grammars, for example, for the German language based on comparison with the languages like English (M. Hellinger), French (J.-M. Zemb), Spanish (N. Cartagena & H.-M. Gauger), Romanian (U. Engel et al.), Serbo-Croatian (U. Engel & P. Mrazović) and Polish (U. Engel et al.).

One of the current projects of the German language institute (Mannheim, Germany) is “Grammatik des Deutschen im europäischen Vergleich” [Grammar of the German language in comparison with the languages of Europe], aimed at grammatical description of the German language in contrast to other European languages, mostly, English, French, Polish and Hungarian. The project is not expected to carry out a systemic, comprehensive analysis of the language pairs, though, and the language data used in the analysis are quite selective. Moreover, while the above mentioned projects are very important on its own, they, however, are still aimed at description of structural levels of the language and its systemic phenomena. Therefore, they do not fulfill the needs of investigating the use of linguistics means in intra- and intercultural communication. In accordance with the current research paradigm, they need to be expanded with a comparative description of communication strategies and models that are distinct for each of the languages in the language pair under the analysis. Works that follow this direction are few in number and as a rule are not consistent being aimed at identifying the peculiarities of performance for single speech acts or

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