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

Elizaveta G. Kotorova*

University of Zielona Góra, al. Wojska Polskiego 71A, 65-762 Zielona Góra, Poland
National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, 30, Lenin Ave., 634050, Tomsk, Russia

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

* Corresponding author. Tel./Fax: +48-68-328-31-45 .
E-mail address: e.kotorova@gmail.com
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-Aertseelaer 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, Japanese, 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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(which is rare) classes of speech acts (see, for example, Miodek, 1994; Pisarek, 1995; Prokop, 1995; Dnzoutchep, 2006; Kantorczyk, Komorowska, Lysakova, & Veselovskaja 2008; Engel, & Tomiczek, 2010; Neuland, 2011).

2. Factors defining speech behaviour particularities

It is quite clear that there is a need of supplementing the existing lack of knowledge concerning the peculiarities of communication behavior in different language communities in accordance with the above mentioned requirements for pragmatic research in linguistics. The aim of such research is to identify similarities and differences in functioning of the utterances that realize pragmatic intention of the major speech acts belonging to each of the illocutionary types and to define prototypical and peripheral means expressing them in each of the compared languages.

The most efficient way to fulfill these objectives is to combine both approaches to the comparative study of speech behavior exhibited by representatives of different cultures. On the one hand, the best practice for gathering and analyzing the data developed within these approaches can be used. On the other hand, it will help to develop more useful and compelling methods for description of the phenomena under the study.

It is in the direct communicative interaction at a given moment of time, in a given “communication space” where varying degrees of socio-cultural, age-specific, gender, linguistic and other peculiarities of individual interlocutors are revealed. Being representatives of a certain linguo-socioculture, interlocutors are the bearers of moral and ethical norms, as well as strategies of verbal and non-verbal behavior customary for the given culture.

Communication behavior peculiarities are defined by the following groups of factors:

1) socio-pragmatic; 2) cultural; 3) situational; 4) linguistic.

Socio-pragmatic factors are connected with the personality of interactants and reflect their position in the social sphere. Here belong various characteristics of communicating individuals, first of all, the following:

- social status of interlocutors, i.e. their belonging to a certain social group, profession, position, education level, family status, etc.; relations between interlocutors can be symmetric and asymmetric;
- social distance between interlocutors: zero, neutral or close relations;
- bio-physiological characteristics of interlocutors, first of all, their sex and age;
- nationality;
- psychological type of interlocutors, i.e. their temperament, extrovert or introvert orientation, elements of pathology, etc.;
- language competence, i.e. knowledge of a certain language code that interlocutors use in verbal interaction;
- degree of acquaintance between interlocutors (see Bogdanov, 1990, p. 28 - 29).

Cultural factors are connected with cultural specifics of the society where interlocutors belong to. These factors are expressed in traditions, customs and cultural norms. The most important factors are the following:

- norms of etiquette, i.e. general traditional rules dictating behavior patterns in a society,
- norms of politeness that regulate relations between interlocutors in a given situation. The notion of politeness is undoubtedly connected very close with the notion of speech etiquette. However, in our opinion, it would be a mistake to equate these two notions. While speech etiquette defines the rules of behavior and consequently the use of appropriate linguistic expressions in certain given situations, politeness is directed at mutually respectful treatment between interlocutors. The rules of etiquette are not equal to the moral rules.
- social stereotypes as standardized opinion on certain social groups or representatives of these groups;
- situational factors belong directly to the situation in which communication takes place. They are the following:
- time and place of event;
- connection of speech act with other utterances;
- current psychological state of interlocutors, i.e. their mood, current knowledge, objectives and interests, etc.
Linguistic factors are connected with specifics of systemic-structural organization of language. The most important linguistic factors are:

- set of grammatical categories specific for a given language;
- specifics of organizing national discourse;
- frequency of use of certain language means in communication.

Many of the afore-mentioned factors bear national specifics. This is a characteristic feature of 1) many sociopragmatic factors (for example, the degree of influence of the age factor or the social status factor on speech behavior can substantially vary in eastern and western countries), 2) general cultural norms (the rules of speech etiquette and ideas of politeness are not the same too in different communication societies), and 3) situational norms (predominance of communication belonging to vertical or horizontal type, observance of the distance between interlocutors). Influence of the linguistic factors is connected to the peculiarities of the language code used by interlocutors.

The most appropriate method to study the way the first three groups of the above-mentioned factors function, is the questionnaire survey. It makes it possible to select situations and control the variability of its extralinguistic parameters. The analysis of questionnaires results in making a large corpus of speech patterns in each language under the comparison. This method allows to use a necessary number of situations with different combinations of sociopragmatic, cultural and situational factors in the analysis, in order to elicit correlates of speech acts in the given languages on the level of particular situations of communication. When developing the questionnaires, one should take into account the existing best practices and recommendations (see Bowers, & Courtright, 1984; Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Keyton, 2001). However, this all should be adapted and adjusted with respect to the speech acts under study and specific circumstances of carrying out the questionnaire survey.

3. The notion of communicative-pragmatic field

An important aspect of contrastive pragmalinguistics is comparing forms of realization of various speech behavior patterns (speech acts) in the languages under the analysis. In order to fulfill this objective, we propose an innovative methodology based on the synthesis of ideas about the prototypical structure of categories and classes of objects (E. Rosch, G. Lakoff) and the possibility of presenting various linguistic phenomena in the form of a field (J. Trier, E. Coseriu, A. Bondarko).

The field approach has proven to be a rather productive way of representing relations that exist between the elements of a language system. The term ‘field’ means in this case a certain group of linguistic elements that exhibit relations and interdependence with each other. The notion of ‘field’ has long been used only for the analysis and description of structural division of the language vocabulary (J. Trier, L. Weißgerber, E. Coseriu etc.). The further development of the field theory brought up the idea that the field principle could be applied more widely, in particular, as a model for semantic description of the language in general, and also as a basic framework for determining the functional division of language. The fundamental idea remains the same that linguistic elements that have some common property (either formal, or semantic, or functional) can be arranged according to the field principle.

In our opinion, it is also possible to regard the aim of a communicative act or its illocutionary force as a field dominant. This approach provides a possibility to consolidate all possible speech act realizations in a language with a given illocutionary force into a field. It is this field that we could call a communicative-pragmatic field.

The idea to conceptualize speech acts on the basis of the field model dates back to the 70s-80s of the 20th century in the East Germany. The proposed hypothesis was that the functional-communicative fields exist as a reality in the linguistic consciousness (sprachliches Selbstbewusstsein) and are characterized on the linguistic level as a kind of commonness of expressive language means which form a potential semantic unity because of its attachment to a particular communicative intent and specific reflection of the object of communication (cf. Wilske, 1979, p. 56; Starke, 1979, p. 145). The scientific basis of this conception was, on the one hand, the theory of functional grammar, which used the field method to represent the functional-semantic categories, functional-semantic fields, grammatical-lexical fields. On the other hand, the above mentioned hypothesis had been developing within the research framework devoted to the study of language communicative activity as a means of acquisition of language
and social experience (Starke, 1979, p. 139). The scientific objectives of the majority of the authors were therefore mainly of methodological and pedagogical nature. Summarizing the research activity within this direction, Karl Ernst Sommerfeldt defines the functional-communicative field as a group of linguistic means and their combinations representing the specific type of linguistic communicative action with its specific feature structure (1984, p. 20-21). These ideas, unfortunately, did not receive any further development neither in theoretical nor in practical respect, and therefore have remained as a mere hypothesis. This hypothesis, however, in our opinion, is very efficient.

In the modern German linguistic literature, the term “communicative-pragmatic field” (kommunikativ-pragmatisches Feld) as interpreted by W. Flämig is very similar to the term "functional-semantic field" proposed in the theory of functional grammar developed by A. V. Bondarko and his disciples. Such fields, according to Flämig, combine a set of various lexical and grammatical means serving to express grammatical meanings and communicative-pragmatic connections. As a typical example, Flämig cites the expression of modality using words with a modal value, modal verbs, or modal constructions (1991, p. 326 - 327).

Applying a field model to the analysis of speech act realization patterns could make a valuable contribution to the development of the speech act theory, since despite all the differences in the interpretation of the notion ‘field’, it is possible to name many advantages of the field analysis model. Among them are the following:

- with the help of the field model it is possible to identify systemic relations between the elements, thus revealing their functional interdependence;
- the field structure allows to clearly demonstrate paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations between the elements;
- the field model may contribute to some extent to advancing and proving hypotheses about the type of organization of various language subsystems (cf. Schippan, 1992, p. 223).

The above-mentioned positive aspects of the field theory are valid at the pragmatic level as well with regard to the speech act system in which communicative actions are realized. Illocution (or illocutionary force of utterance according to Austin) can be regarded as the most important part of any communicative act. Usually, sounds, words and sentences are uttered only to fulfill certain communicative intentions. An illocutionary act is set to realize the goal of the interlocutor and is defined by the situation the interlocutor is in and what goals he or she pursues (a wish, a recommendation, a warning, etc.). This strategy of communication behavior implies that there will be used certain linguistic means to realize it. Thus, illocution and utterance patterns should be regarded as the most important constituents of the communicative-pragmatic field.

4. Main components of the field structure

An important issue in the field theory is the interpretation of its structure. The most detailed description of the field structure can be found in the theory of functional-semantic fields (see Bondarko 1971, 1984, Bondarko & Shubik 2005). The basic principles of this description are applicable mutatis mutandis to the theory of communicative-pragmatic field.

The field consolidates the inventory of various utterances that interact with each other and are organized into a system. The constitutive factor or the dominant of the communicative-pragmatic field is the communicative goal or illocutionary force obligatorily inherent to all components in the field. The main constitutive principle of the field structure is the division of the means that make up the field into central and peripheral. The dominant organizing the field and the realization means that are most closely related to it make up the field core, while the rest of the constituents are distributed across the field periphery (Gulyga & Shendel's, 1969:10).

The core and the periphery differ in the following respects:

- maximum concentration of specific characteristics (core) – less specific characteristics (periphery);
- maximal functional load (core) – lesser functional load (periphery);
- maximum specialization of the relevant linguistic means for realization of a certain function (core) – secondary role in the realization (periphery)
- the highest degree of manifestation (core)
Along with the common features, the communicative-pragmatic field shows also peculiarities in its organization which are described below.

5. Communicative-pragmatic field as a basis for contrastive language studies

The current stage of development of pragmatic research on the one hand, and modification of the field model consistent with the developments of the speech act theory, on the other hand, create a basis for comprehensive pragmalinguistic analysis and description of communicative behavior of a person. Such a description can be based on data of one language or several languages, in the latter case it will be comparative in nature. A comprehensive comparative research should include a range of communicative-pragmatic fields, whose nomenclature would correspond to the most important speech acts such as AFFIRMATION, WISH, ORDER, APOLOGY, PROMISE, etc. The totality of fields in a full description should cover all the types of communicative activity. The way the list of these fields should look like depends on the basis of speech act classification used and how detailed this classification would be. In this connection, alongside with the traditional classifications (J. Searle, Ju. Habermas), one should also take into account other classifications that include and characterize not only speech act classes but single speech acts as well (s. U. Engel, 1996). In the case of the majority of languages such a comprehensive description is yet to be done.

The most important characteristics of the description of communicative-pragmatic field are as follows.

1) As it has been already mentioned, the organizing and constitutive factor of the communicative-pragmatic field is a certain pragmatic invariant that can be defined as illocutionary force inherent to all the field constituents. The problem to be solved here concerns the semantic explication of illocutionary force as it should be expounded on the basis of certain metalanguage and this representation should be as much uniform as possible with regard to various communicative-pragmatic fields. As a possible scientific framework for describing of the pragmatic invariant one can use A. Wierzbicka’s theory of universal semantic metalanguage. In a number of her works devoted to the study and intercultural comparison of speech acts and speech genres one can find examples of this kind of explications, for instance, concerning WARNING:

"...the illocutionary force of warning is analyzed in the following way:
I say: if you do X, something bad (Y) may happen to you
I say this because I want to cause you to know it and be able to cause that bad thing (Y) not to happen to you"

(Wierzbicka, 1985, p. 495).
Explications for other speech acts can be formulated in a similar way.

2) The second problem is defining the principles according to which the constituents will be distributed within the field, i.e. which of them will belong to the center and which to the periphery.

Linguists working within the theory of functional grammar, especially Alexander Bondarko in his pioneering work, as well as his disciples, assumed that in inflected languages the center of the functional-semantic field is formed by linguistic units of the morphological level. In pragmatic studies the key role in defining constituents of the core is played by the prototype principle. According to this principle the means that belong to the field center are those a) being very specific about the given illocutionary force; b) more precisely expressing the given illocutionary force and therefore being polysemic to a lesser degree; c) being used consistently to express the given pragmatic invariant. The prototypical means thus include primarily neutral expressions used in the different situations of human communication. This raises a very difficult question of how the degree of prototypicality of the means expressing illocutionary force can be determined. The best way, of course, would be a relevant statistical analysis supplemented with pragmatic and linguistic studies. Since, however, the true statistical analyses are time-consuming and require special training, it seems plausible to use the results of questionnaires, as well as generalizations of this kind of analysis in the form of charts and tables as the empirical basis for the analysis of communicative-pragmatic fields. It should be borne in mind that in this case, all statements regarding the prototypical means comprising the center of the field would to a certain extent subjective.

3) The third important issue that should be mentioned concerns the place of performative verbs in the field. Assuming that the means belonging to the field core prototypically implement the illocutionary goal of statements, one can easily come to the conclusion that the presence of performative verbs in the center of the field is obligatory for every speech act. However, as this is not always the case, some elaboration on the correlation of illocutionary acts and performative verbs is needed here.

There are three types of relationships between illocutionary acts and performative verbs:

- some illocutionary acts can only be realized by means of certain performative verbs. The number of these acts is not large, for example, name (baptize), bequeath, adjudge. In this case, the communicative-pragmatic field has a very pronounced core in the form of an appropriate performative verb with virtually no peripheral means to express this illocutionary goal.
- the majority of speech acts are indeed prototypically realized by means of a performative verb, but in this case there are many other ways to express the speech act, for example: apology, thank, promise and others. These communicative-pragmatic fields do have their respective performative verbs in the core, but they also have a rich periphery of other means. Moreover, there are fields in which expression with the help of a performative verb occupies a rather peripheral position, for example, order, affirm.
- in some cases the illocutionary verb denoting the goal of action cannot be used as performative in any way, for instance, threaten, offend, deceive. In this case, the respective performative verb does not belong to the constituents of the field.

4) The fourth important characteristic concerns the dependence of the field composition on the language and culture. In different languages and cultures one and the same illocutionary goal can be expressed by different means. The distribution of the means within the field can also vary depending on the language and culture. In this respect, the field model is a convenient means for comparative analysis as it can provide illustrative results.

The communicative-pragmatic field model described above has been the subject of discussions during a number of linguistic conferences (Wroclaw 2006, Stockholm 2010, Geneva 2013) and has been successfully applied to contrastive pragmatic studies in a number of Master's and PhD theses supervised by the author of the article. These analyses allowed to identify similarities and differences in a wide array of statements implementing certain types of speech acts in Russian, German, English and Polish (see Komorova 2005, Petrova 2010, Jankowska 2007 etc.).

For instance, comparing the field of CONGRATULATION in German and Russian has revealed that in the German language the field core basically contains implicit performatives like _Alle guten Wünsche zum Geburtstag!_ [All the best wishes to the birthday], while in the Russian language, it is explicit expressions that prevail, e.g.: _Pozdravlyayu tebya s Dnem rozhdeniya!_ [(I) congratulate you on the birthday] (Komorova 2004).
The analysis of the field of REACTIVE ADVICE has shown that in the Russian language the field core consists basically of imperative utterances in the complete and incomplete form like *Podarite vnuku mototsikl* [Buy your grandson a motobike] and *Mame - buket tsvetov* [To mother - a bunch of flowers]. In the American English, the field core contains not only imperative utterances like *Get them concert tickets*, but also such explicitly performative utterance of assertive type as *You should get them a gift card* (Petrova 2010).

6. Conclusion

Despite a growing number of papers analyzing individual speech acts over the last few years, it is clear that a comprehensive description of the communicative-pragmatic area of most languages still remains a task to be done.
The methodology based on the communicative-pragmatic field that we propose in this article can undoubtedly make a significant contribution to this kind of research.

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