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Nicolae-Sorin DRĂGAN*

Semiosis in Communication: Differences and Similarities. Introductory Remarks

In a world of global communication, where everyone's life depends increasingly on signs, language and communication, understanding how we relate to otherness, to *differences* in all their forms and aspects becomes more and more relevant. Today, we often understand the *differences* in terms of adversity or opposition and forget the value of the *similarities*. According to Eco (1995), the radicalization of these concepts can lead to problematic situations such as "fear of difference", a typical feature of *Ur-Fascism*, or *Eternal Fascism*.

Semiotic approaches can provide a critical point of view and a more general reflection that can redefine some aspects of the discussion about the nature of these semiotic categories, *differences* and *similarities*. The dichotomy *differences* – *similarities* is fundamental to understanding the meaning-making mechanisms in language (de Saussure, 1966; Derrida, 1978; Deleuze, 1995), as well as in other sign systems (Ponzio, 1995; Sebeok & Danesi, 2000; Deely, 2009; Petrilli, 2014). While in science, "the oppositions, the differences are relevant", in history "social facts have two aspects: one of *coexistence*, which is described by *similarities*, and another one of *succession*, which is described by *differences*" (Marcus, 2011, p. 351). Meaning always appears in the "play of *differences*" (Derrida, 1978, p. 220) and *similarities*. Derrida (1978) seems to confirm Rousseau's (1998) intuition that "one must first observe the differences in order to discover the properties" (p. 305). Therefore, the phenomena of similarities and differences must be considered complementary (Marcus, 2011).

The three papers selected to appear in this issue of the *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations* were initially presented at the second edition of the *Semiosis in Communication* conference, hosted by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in June 2018. This edition of the *Semiosis in Communication* conference was a testimony of the interest in semiotic research among scholars around the world. Internationally renowned keynote speakers Augusto Ponzio (University of Bari "Aldo Moro", Bari, Italy), Susan Petrilli (University of Bari "Aldo Moro", Bari, Italy), Paul Cobley (Middlesex University, London, UK), Göran Sonesson (Lund University, Sweden), Dario Martinelli (Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania), Massimo Leone (University of Turin,

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Italy), Luis Emilio Bruni (Aalborg University Copenhagen, Denmark) and Kristian Bankov (New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria) have shared their experience and knowledge in plenary lectures.

The three articles included in the *Semiosis in communication* section of this the current issues of the journal explore various forms of manifestation of *differences* and *similarities* in contemporary communication phenomena and examine how this dichotomy generates meanings in different communication situations, both from the theoretical and applied semiotics perspectives.

Maria Antoniou's papers examines certain issues that arise in the translation of political texts, especially titles of press articles, taking into consideration the linguistic and sociocultural factors as well as the "conditions that rule the political discourse in terms of linguistic politeness". Antoniou emphasize also the role of "cultural ethos of each linguistic community", especially politeness markers expressing a certain linguistic attitude towards the translated text.

The paper belonging to Katarina Damcevic and Filip Rodik investigates the peculiarities and manner in which nationalist discourse is built on selected right-wing public Facebook pages in Croatia using a quantitative approach. Moreover, in order to explore "the dynamics of hate speech online", Damcevic and Rodik analyzed the socio-communicative functions of hate speech from the perspective of cultural semiotics. The study offers insight into "meaning-making mechanisms and discursive strategies that influence and shape hate speech and its online dynamic" and draws attention to the proliferation of hate speech in post-conflict societies such as Croatia.

Nicolae-Sorin Drăgan's paper analyzes the differences that arise among political actors, from the perspective of how they manage the relationship between *handedness* (left/right polarity in hand gestures) and *political orientation* (left/right polarity in politics) in the 2009 Romanian presidential debate, compared to the 2014 presidential debate. Through this study, the author suggests that "the management of *handedness – political orientation* and *handedness – emotional valence* relationships influences 'image capital' of political actors, and produces effects in terms of credibility and political persuasion".

The articles included in this issue investigate the complexity of the meaning-making mechanisms in various communication situations, with reference to the *differences – similarities* dichotomy. Moreover, these articles highlight the interdisciplinary aspect of semiotic approaches and provide a starting point for further explorations in this direction.

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Maria ANTONIOU*

Cultural Ethos Constructed in Press Titles and Their Translation: The Case of Political Discourse

“Discovering the principles of language usage may be largely coincident with discovering the principles out of which social relationships, in their interactional aspect, are structured: dimensions by which individuals manage to relate to others in particular ways”.
(Brown & Levinson, 1987)

Abstract

The present study explores, from a contrastive point of view, the conditions that rule the political discourse in terms of linguistic politeness. By contrasting the data (examples drawn from press titles, mainly the French journal *Le Monde Diplomatique* and its’ translations into Greek), we will be able to discover the underlying operations and constraints that regulate the use of such markers and to reach conclusions about the existence or not of symmetrical uses of our two languages. The theoretical framework followed is that of Brown and Levinson and the one of the Theory of Enunciation.

In the case of press titles translation, despite the possibility of using symmetrical structures in source text as well as in target text, different structures are mostly preferred. This discrepancy leads to hypothesis about different linguistic attitudes of each linguistic community reflected explicitly by the use of different syntactic/lexical markers. It is this awareness that enabled Brown and Levinson (1987: 248) to consider cross-cultural variation and recognise that some societies may be oriented towards one or the other type of politeness (i.e. negative or positive)», formulating the so called cultural ethos of each linguistic community.

Keywords: Politeness, Pragmatics, Intercultural Communication, Cultural Ethos, Headlines, Greek.

Introduction

In the field of pragmatics, politeness is a culturally defined phenomenon, sufficiently studied mainly because of its discursive importance and its serious implications in the interper-

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sonal communication. Lakoff (1975, p. 64) defines politeness “as a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse [...] designed specifically for the facilitation of interaction” and explains that “politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction” (Lakoff, 1989, p. 102).

Presuming that politeness is triggered similarly in all cultures is an assumption that has been rejected long time ago (Fraser¹, 1990; Nwoye, 1992). Lakoff (1973, p.45) had explained that politeness is developed by societies. Moreover, even within the same linguistic community, discrepancy can be observed, consisting in talking about the very same «thing or real-world situation» using descriptions which «may end up sounding utterly unrelated» Lakoff (1973, p. 46). Consequently, what is polite in one culture may be insulting in another. Therefore, literature concerning politeness focuses on linguistic markers, carriers of politeness. Through measuring and comparing those markers across genres of discourse and even cultures, scientists (pragmaticians, semioticians, linguists, etc.) try to decode the system of signs used to express (im)politeness and explain the characteristics of the world we live in, using «our linguistic behavior as a diagnostic of our hidden feelings about things» Lakoff (1975, p. 46).

Even though the analysis of political discourse is scarcely new, the present essay constitutes an attempt to explore the conditions governing political discourse in terms of linguistic politeness, as far as the Greek language is concerned in relation to the French source texts and compared to French language. We examine some linguistic markers with regard to the expression of politeness/impoliteness in French and Greek language. We attend to discover the force of signs, what language use can tell us; what are the underlying operations as well as the constraints regulating the use of such markers. We seek to look beyond the surface features, in order to discover the underlying organization of phenomena. We aim to prove how linguistic markers «guide metapragmatically aware readers into implicated assumptions and implicated conclusions retrieved» (Ifantidou, 2011; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1997a).

By contrastingly comparing the data, we reach to conclusions about the existence or not of symmetrical linguistics structures in French and Greek, and, presumably, about the underlying cultural values specific to each language, and, hence, to each linguistic group, in order to evaluate the characteristic of each group. Consequently, we address the subject of the so called cultural ethos (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 297). Moreover, via the comparison of source and target texts, we investigate the conditions and processes behind the linguistic markers that promote or restrict the various signs from reemergence. More precisely, we examine whether the Greek target version promotes patterns which privilege vantage point of politeness or, alternatively, favors options in the target text that do not assume politeness. In other words, we examine the degree of cross-cultural variation allowed between orientation towards positive politeness and negative politeness (Blum-Kulka, 1987).

The framework

Every society embraces certain forms of behavior as accepted and pertinent. Speakers who adjust to these specific socially drawn patterns of politeness are rendering communication successful and appropriate in that particular environment (Lakoff, 1975, 1990; Nwoye, 1992). The goal of politeness is to make all parties feel comfortable with one another.

We use the theoretical framework proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson (1987) as well as that of the Theory of Enunciation (Culioli, 1974, 1985, 1990, 1999a, 1999b).