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CONTRASTIVE PRAGMATICS AND CORPORA: TOWARD INTERCULTURAL STUDIES

Abstract: This paper discusses contrastive pragmatics as a vehicle towards a more comprehensive approach to language study, where language studies are seen as necessary part of intercultural studies. Looking at different pragmatic phenomena (such as pragmatic hedging, politeness strategies etc.) and relying on the ethnopragmatic concept of cultural scripts (Wierzbicka 1994; Goddard 2006) as well as on the insights of intercultural pragmatics, the paper attempts at illustrating how contrastive pragmatic analysis of (small) linguistic corpora may reveal cultural similarities and differences otherwise rather invisible to microlinguistic analyses; it also reflects on the significance such findings may bear for interculturally biased study of language.

Key words: contrastive pragmatics; ethnopragmatics; intercultural pragmatics; linguistic corpora.

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present and discuss the advantages of carrying out contrastive pragmatic research using (fairly small and customized) linguistic corpora specifically compiled to provide evidence of pragmatic phenomena under investigation. The paper consists of four sections: Section 2 relates contrastive pragmatics to pragmatics, ethnopragmatics (Goddard 2002, 2006; Wierzbicka 1994, 1996) and intercultural pragmatics (Kecskes 2013) and lays out reasons for carrying out contrastive analyses of pragmatic phenomena in the first place. In this section, I will also discuss relative advantages of using 'small customized

corpora' over the large representative corpora such as the BNC or COCA. In section 3, I will provide examples of contrastive research that look into different types of pragmatic phenomena found in real-life discourse, such as hedging in semi-scientific discourse, modality and stance in pop and rock culture, or identification and contrasting of evidential strategies in English and Serbian journalistic discourse on political themes. In Section 4, I will conclude reflecting on the impact the contrastive pragmatic approach may have on the concept of intercultural studies and education.

2. Why Contrastive Pragmatics?

In the interview given to the journal Bells (Rasulić2009:236), David Crystal explained how he saw the role of pragmatics in the study of language:

> [...] pragmatics is probably the most important area of all in language study. But it's so recent that it's difficult to percieve it's full potential. [...] But the detailed empirical studies of the pragmatics of English, say, and then the pragmatics of French, say, and then – do English and French pragmatics meet or what are the diffferences between the two, a sort of *contrastive pragmatics*... [...]

Crystal goes on to comment on the importance of the area of contrastive pragmatics for language teaching:

> I think this is a very important area, and one that governs a lot of change of direction that I see in language teaching [...]. One of the biggest movements in English mother tongue teaching in schools in Britain at the moment is a switch from straight descriptive grammatical studies to pragmatic studies . Not just *what* grammar [...], but *why*[...] that grammar [...].(Rasulić 2009:237)

Having taught courses in Contrastive linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, Pragmatics and Modality for a number of years, I found these words trully encouraging, since they justified the approach I have somehow spontaneously developed in order to help my students, non-native speakers of English and future teachers, relate the content of the courses

and put the acquired knowledge to a practical purpose in carrying out their own reasearch (which is actually required in these courses). In a way, the decision to direct my students towards contrastive pragmatics in their first research endevours was motivated by the fact that the students were non-native, though higly proficient, speakers of English. However, although their mastery of the system of the English language was quite high, what a great majority of them lacked was the awareness of the importance of the subtle pragmatic competences, whose absence often leads to misunderstandings and failures in real-life communication, especially in (intercultural and cross cultural) *lingua franca* communication (Kecskes 2013). Those being a subject of my own research interest (Trbojević-Milošević 2019), and the fact that I have been teaching Introduction to corpus linguistics in the past ten years or so have influenced my decision to put my students on the path of what Johns (2002) describes as data-driven learning, which aims at confronting "the learner as directly as possible with the data, and to make thelearner a linguistic researcher […] [someone who is able] to recognize and drawconclusions from clues in the data […]" (Johns 2002: 108).

2.1. Pragmatics: from rationalist to intercultural

Defining the discipline and the scope of pragmatics has never been an easy task. As Searle,Kiefer and Bierwisch (1980:viii) put it :

"Pragmatics is one of those words (*societal* and *cognitive* are others) that give the impression that something quite specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning".

The reason for this absence of clear delimitation of the term probably lies in the width of its scope of interest: in its classical sense, pragmatics is concerned with how the listener/reader arrives at the *intendedmeaning* that iscommunicated by the speaker/writer. It can then be defined as the study of how *inferences* are drawn in communication, when more gets communicated / interpreted than is technically being said. Pragmatics, on the other hand, may also be concerned with the actual way meaning *gets* created by the speaker/reader, taking into consideration societal factors such as intention, cooperation and relevance to the situation, as well as those which are individual, such as speaker's attention, her prior experience that turns out to be salient in her, cognitively speaking,

egocentric linguistic choices (Keysar 2008, Giora 2003, Kecskes 2013). No matter which way pragmatics directs its focus, to the speaker or the listener, it invariably takes into account how *context* influences what is said and how it is being understood.

Context, however, is yet another notion whose definition appears to be quite elusive. It may be taken as a multi-tiered, dynamic structure that includes the textual neighbourhood of a word, speaker's prior experience which triggers certain verbal behaviour (private or prior context), the actual circumstances in which a (speech) event takes place , even cultural norms and rules that overarch the speaker's linguistic choices. Clearly, context in all its senses always governs the choices that speaker makes deciding what to say and what not to say: these choices are made at every level – at the level of grammar just as well as on the level of human social behaviour, when the speaker estimates relative closeness/distance with or from her interlocutor(s) (Watts 2004).

So, it becomes pretty clear that pragmatic linguistic choices are inextricably related to the *culture* of which the language is part, which makes these choices culture sensitive, even culture governed.

Let me give an example of asimple directive speech act (request to close the door). A quick research into possible linguistic realizations in Serbian would probably result in the following set of utterances, in which the imperative stands out as the linguistic expression of directive, sometimes accompanied by the formulaic *molim* and sometimes not. The list of possible utterances would also include semi-formulaic utterances or expressions of procedural meaning such as S2).

S1) Zatvori[te] vrata, (molim te [vas])!
S2) Da li biste bili ljubazni da zatvorite vrata,(molim vas)? [T/V distinction variation also possible]
S3) Budite ljubazni, zatvorite vrata (molim vas)! [T/V distinction variation also possible]

A research into the English inventory would possibly provide us with the following list[1]

E: Close the door, please!
E2) Would you mind closing the door, please?

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1 The lists of possible utterances in either language are not exhaustive, of course, but they are given only for illustrative purposes here. They might include eliptical structures – *Vrata!* for instance.

E3) Would you be so kind to close the door, please?
E4) Be an angel, close the door, please!
E5) Kindly close the door.

Even a superficial look at these utterances reveals dissimilarities, although quite a few similarities are easilly spotted as well. Both languages have the imperative and use it readily in directive acts; both languages have on their disposal very similar play-downs on the illocutionary force of the imperative. Its strength, of course, is negotiable on-line, relative to the situational context, be the interlocutors English or Serbian. Further research, however, in frequency of occurence of such utterances would show[2] that the speakers of Serbian opt for the imperative much more often than the speakers of English, as it is obviously percieved appropriate in most of the situations where it would be invariably avoided in English *as impolite*.

The resercher could stop at these results, but such findings would remain, so to say, rather baren. The question of *why* the speakers of Serbian make different choices from their linguistic inventory that is almost identical to the linguistic inventory of English would remain unanswered. At this point, it would be necessary to broaden the scope of research and turn to the pragmatic study that concerns itself with such choices and is called either ethnopragmatics or ethnosyntaxin a broad sense of the word (Enfield 2002; Goddard 2002, 2006). Ethnopragmatics, as the study of culture specific norms, rules and models of usage, overlaps with ethnosyntax which studies the "connections between the cultural knowledge, attitudes and practices of speakers on the one hand and the morphosyntactic resources they employ in speech on the other" (Enfield 2002:5). The main technique of ethnopragmatic description is the identification of the so-called 'cultural scripts' as proposed by Wierzbicka (1994, 1996) and Goddard (2006). Cultural scripts are representations or scenarios that capture culture-specific norms, speakers' beliefs, way of thinking and ways of speaking that are typical in particular cultural contexts. They use the metalanguage of universal semantic primitives (Wierzbicka 1996) to describe 'local' discursive conventions in a precise and clear way that is equally accessible to members and non-members of a particular culture.

Therefore, when our 'imperative researcher' includes the ethnopragmatic (cultural) factors into her analysis, the speech practices

2 Indeed,a similar research has been carried out (Trbojević-Milošević 2009) .

she is investigating would open up for a deeper and broader interpretation and could finally be translated into a possible cultural script relating to *directness* (for Serbian):

If I want someone to do something, it is NOT BAD to say to this person something likethis

'I want you to do something; because of this, you have to do it'

This cultural script models not only the encoding of the speaker's intended meaning, but also her own and the listener's perception of directness and, consequently, possible reactions, either verbal or behavioural.

From my 'non-native to non-natives' teacher perspective, the contrastive pragmatic approach which includes the ethnopragmatic factor becomes all the more reasonable when it addresses the intercultural factor as well.The real-life communication(which remains in the focus of all pragmatic disciplines) is increasingly becoming intercultural and unfolds through *lingua franca*, mostly English. Intercultural encounters, though, abound in instances of misunderstanding, miscommunication or communication failures, which cannot be pinned down to mere lack of linguistic competences. On the contrary, as recent research shows (Mustajoki 2017), it seems that speakers'/interlocutors'lower proficiency in *lingua franca* is compensated for by greater focus on the language used and communication in general; however, high-proficiency speakers, those who feel 'at home' in the language, tend to overlook the common ground and appropriate recipient design traps and quite often fall into them. For intercultural pragmatics, which "focuses on intercultural interactions and investigates the nature of the communicative process among people from different cultures, speaking different first languages" (Kecskes 2017) such problematic interchanges are of particular importance, as they reveal the complex working and interplay of the factors mentioned above, namely the societal and individual ones (Trbojević-Milošević 2019).

This rather completes this 'panoramic' view of different pragmatic approaches that form the theoretical starting pointfor the application of contrastive pragmatics procedures and identify problem areas that legitimize the need for contrastive pragmatics. Validity of such contrastive research, however, depends on the representative amount of 'real communication/language' data processed, which calls for the inclusion of corpus linguistics tools. We thus become witness to the making of a fairly new approach, as Aijmer (2020) says in a recent article:

"Contrastive corpus pragmatics' can be regarded as a new field of research characterised by the joint approaches of pragmatics, corpus linguistics and contrastive analysis for describing the similarities and differences between languages." (Aijmer 2020:28)

2.2. Why corpus and what corpus?

Having agreed that real-life communication, or language usage represents the focus of any pragmatic discipline and that as researches we tend to look for typicall patterns and contextual factors that govern the speaker's choice of those patterns, then linguistic corpora seem to be the only plausible solution, for a number of well-known reasons: firstly, as analysts of 'real language' we cannot rely on our own intuition, sporadic evidence or several speakers' idiosyncrasies , as the validity and reliability of the conclusions so drawn would suffer greatly.

An example of a corpus-based pragmatic research that proves how intuitive claims may be wrong is provided by Coates (2004), in her discussion of Holmes' (1995) results regarding the distribution of the *you know* discourse marker among men and women. She observes that

[...] women recorded by Holmes use *you know* more frequently than men when it expresses confidence , but less frequently when it expresses uncertainty. Holmes's sensitive analysis demonstrates that hedges are multifunctional and that any analysis of gender differences needs to allow for this. Moreover, her findings challenge Lakoff's blanket assertion that women use more hedges than men as well as Lakoff's claim that women's use of hedges is related to lack of confidence, since female speakers used *you know*more in its confident sense.' (Coates:2004:89)

As already said above, as analysts we need a large ammount (or at least, enough) of language data from a large number of speakers/writers. Also, as we focus on 'real language' occuring in authentic discourse, we engage in empirical work that calls for large collections of texts collected following the principles of representativeness. That would, in turn, allow for both quantitative and qualitative analysis, i.e. functional explanation, exemplification and interpretation of the quantitative data (Biber et al 2004).

The number of standardized, large corpora such as the British National Corpus, the Corpus of Contemporary American, or corpora containing multimodal data on children's language such as CHILDESor the language of teenagers (COLT) and the fact they are easilly accessible through the Internet have proven to be a great aid in pragmatic research; unfortunately, when it comes to contrastive pragmatic research, a number of problems crop up. One of them is (though it may sound strange, given the size of those corpora) that they do not provide the researcher with enough linguistic material covering the phenomenon under research (e.g. the amount of data on email communication in the BNC is far from representative). Another problem often encountered by researches who use the large standardized corpora is that they do not give enough contextual information (e.g. research regarding development of speech acts in children). Even greater, probably the most serious problem for a contrastivist, is the assymetry in availabilty of corpora in L1 and L2 : more often than not, the researcher will not have a comparable L2 corpus available – which is almost always the case when contrasting pragmatic phenomena in English and Serbian.

The way out of those problems may be found in the researcher's decision to compile her own specialized corpus to fit the purpose of contrastive pragmatic research, following (at least minimal) principles of representativeness. Indeed, an impressive number of studies have been done on small, specialized corpora in the past ten years or so (the Robert Parker's Wine Tasting Notes, or the Brexit Blog Corpus used by Carita Paradis and her associates, for example). The literature on corpus compilation provides useful tips regarding the size of corpus that ensures reliability of the results, as well as on annotation and processing techniques.

Contrastive research of pragmatic phenomena ocurring in authentic spontaneous discourse, however, also faces another compilation problem - and that is how to come by spoken data. The difficulties range from ethical to technical, but can still be overcome either by using samples of recorded TV and radio programmes for example, or – and that would be the last resort – collect data by means of the so-called Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) , which, admittedly, have their drawbacks being some kind of simulations of authentic discourse.

Once these problems are solved and 'pragmatic descriptions' of language usage become available through corpora, the contrastive procedure is practically the same as at any other level of either micro or macro linguistic analysis

3. Examples of small scale corpus-based
   contrastive pragmatic research

In this section, I will briefly present, for purposes of illustration, four studies that looked into different types of pragmatic phenomena: the use of imperatives in male and female speakers of Serbian (Trbojević-Milošević 2008), a contrastive analysis of modal hedging in semi-scientific discourse in English and Serbian (Trbojević-Milošević 2012) , a contrastive analysis of evidential strategies in journalistic discourse on politics (Trbojević-Milošević 2018) and a contrastive analysis of modality markers in English and Serbian pop and rock songs (Stojilkov 2014).

Although I stated in 2.2. that comprehensive studies of usage cannot rely on intuition, anecdotal evidence or small samples, that does not exclude the possibility that intuition or sporadic evidence may inspire corpus based research. The following study   - a comparison of how men and women use imperatives in Serbian was exactly inspired by my intuition formulated then as the hypothesis that the use of *imperative* in requests in Serbian would prove more frequent in male speakers than in female speakers. The corpus was obtained by means of a 10-situation DCT distributed to a demographically sampled population of over 150 informants (male and female) . The research results, however, did not confirm the initial hypothesis, as it turned out that the difference in using imperatives in requests was statistically insignificant, and the hypothesis had been based on a cliché about female politeness strategies.

The second study was inspired by an accidental observation of conspicious difference in using modal hedges in patient instruction leaflets (the English original and its translation into Serbian) accompanying a dietary product. The English text abounded in modal hedging expressions, dominantly epistemic modals, that mitigated the strength and directness of the claims made; the Serbian text abounded in assertions and categorical judgments. The differences were so striking, that they inspired me to compile two corpora, each one including instructions and structural claims for 25 dietary supplements and slimming products that could be found in Serbia and globally. Both corpora were rather small - together they amounted to some 8000 words. The contrastive analysis carried out yielded interesting results – although the linguistic inventory of means for hedging (the expressions of procedural meaning) showed a great deal of similarity, their range was much ampler in English, and so was

the frequency of occurence in the English corpus: the instructions in Serbian featured many more unmitigated direct claims. Modal hedging was present to a degree, but my initial observation about the striking difference between English and Serbian structural claims was strongly confirmed and proved to be a pattern that supported the cultural script for directness preferred by Serbian speakers. Of course, the interpretation of the quantitative results required reference to different cultural factors, such as laws and regulations regulating the market of those products in Serbia and in the English speaking countries.

The third study investigates and contrasts so-called evidential strategies of the interactants in political interviews in English and Serbian. The hypothesis, again inspired by my intuition about Serbian preference for directness, was that evidential markers (inferential, sensory and reportative) would be considerably more frequent in English than in Serbian political/media discourse. The overall corpus compiled consisted of two smaller corpora of around 40,000 words each. The corpora contained interviews with high-rank politicians, business people and people active in the socio-cultural settings of Serbia and the UK.

The normalized frequency of chosen evidentiality markers was found to be fairly balanced between the two corpora (English corpus: 8.5 per 1000 wds; Serbian corpus 6.0 per 1000 wds). The difference in frequency was too slight to point to some distinctive cultural differences as regarding tentativeness or hedging, and there were hardly any contrasts found. The similarities, however, were striking and they showed in the areas of relative (un)reliabilty of evidence, the interplay between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, the alternation between personal and collective voice, in the expression of stance, etc. Once again, the reasons for such absence of contrast had to be sought for in the (inter)cultural factors, as the data triggered conclusions about strong intercultural influences and 'borrowings', showing that Serbian journalists closely followed the role-model of their Anglophone counterparts .

The last but definitely not the least interesting example of using small specialized corpora for contrastive pragmatic research is a graduate student's research into the modality markers in English and Serbian pop and rock songs. She carried out a thorough research into the type, scope and degree of modality in the pop/rock song corpus, trying to get an insight into what could be called the 'mentality of rock culture' . The corpus comprised the lyrics of 210 pop/rock songs in English and Serbian

(around 23000 wds). This research takes into consideration the stereotypes about the anglophone perception and expression of politeness, focusing on the expressions of procedural meaning (EPMs) and evidentials used as pragmatic hedges. The results again support the cultural script for directness :"[...]It becomes clearly identifiable in Serbo-Croatian rock/ pop songs that deontic meaning primarily gets carried across as the imperative" (Stojilkov 2014) and later on, she concludes " [It] confirms the stereotype, since the data clearly shows the Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian preference for directness (cf. the frequency of occurrence of the factive predicator 'know')" (Stojilkov 2014).

4. Conclusion: Toward Intercultural Studies

The examples of research described in the previous section have not been selected only for the purposes of illustrating possible topics and ways of carrying out contrastive pragmatic analysis, but also to point to the relevance of contrastive pragmatic research to the concept of intercultural studies and, consequently, intercultural education of the future linguists and language teachers. I see intercultural education as education conducive to the development of cross-cultural competences in our students, by aiding them in developing a set of cognitive, behavioural and affective/motivational components that enable them to adapt effectively in intercultural environments. The notion of 'intercultural' could also be understood as a continuum that accommodates different cultures within one particular language, such as academic culture, youth culture, professional culture, company culture, etc.

The immediate relevance of contrastive research into pragmatically sensitive topics like those presented in this paper is probably best illustrated by this quote from Goddard and Wierzbicka (2007:113):

> The avoidance of the imperative in modern English and the development of an extended class of interrogative directives (so-called 'wh-imperatives', e.g., 'could you/would you do X') is a linguistic phenomenon whose cultural and linguistic significance can hardly be overestimated. It is a phenomenon which should be *the subject of the first lesson* in acculturation taught to every immigrant to an English-speaking country.

The results of any research embarked upon with full awareness of the cultural sensitiveness of the phenomena under investigation themselves represent a set of relevant data that is legitimate participant in the area of intercultural studies, which, in their own turn should be applied in intercultural education.It is my firm belief that is the route we should put our students of language and linguistics on.

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Brill: DOI: https://doi.org/10.1163/26660393-12340004

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KONTRASTIVNA PRAGMATIKA I KORPUSI:
U SUSRET INTERKULTURNIM STUDIJAMA

Rezime: Ovaj rad ima za cilj da predstavi i obrazloži prednosti kontrastivno-pragmatičkih istraživanja na (relativno malim i specijalizovanim) jezičkim korpusima, posebno kompiliranim da obezbede dovoljno jezičkog materijala za istraživanje pragmatičkih pojava u spontanom i autentičnom diskursu. Rad je podeljen na četiri dela: prvi deo je Uvod u kome se definišu ciljevi rada. U drugom delu, kontrastivna pragmatika se posmatra u odnosu prema racionalističkoj pragmatici, etnopragmatici i interkulturnoj pragmatici. U njemu se, osim toga, izlažu i obrazlažu razlozi za istraživanje pragmatičkih pojava. Takođe, u drugom delu se izlažu relativne prednosti koje specijalizovani korpusi manjeg obima imaju u odnosu na velike standardizovane i reprezentativne baze jezičkih podataka, kao što su Britanski nacionalni korpus i Korpus savremenog američkog. U trećem delu prikazani su primeri kontrastivnih istraživanja koja posmtraju različite tipove pragmatičkih pojava, kao što su modalno ograđivanje u stručnom diskursu, rodno osetljiva upotreba imperativa, modalni markeri stava u pop i rok pesmama na srpskom i engleskom jeziku, kao i evidencijalne strategije kojima se služe učesnici u intervjuima političke tematike. Četvrti deo predstavlja zaključak u kome se podvlači značaj kontrastivno-pragmatičkih istraživanja za interkulturne studije i interkulturno obrazovanje studenata jezika i lingvistike.

Ključne reči: kontrastivna pragmatika, etnopragmatika, interkulturna pragmatika, jezički korpusi