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X-PHEMISMS AND INTENTIONALITY

У статті аналізується роль інтенціональності в інтерпретації евфемістичних та дис-фемістичних висловлювань та доводиться, що екс-фемістичне значення висловлювань не обумовлюється семантичним значенням слів та виразів, а повністю залежить від інтенцій, що стоять за їх використанням. Робиться висновок відносно того, що цей тип інтенціональної комунікації можливо найкращим чином пояснити з позицій теорії релевантності Спербера та Уільсон.

Ключові слова: *інтенціональність, когнітивна прагматика, теорія релевантності, евфемізми.*

The debate around figurative language processing touches upon one of the fundamental questions in linguistics and philosophy of language: do words have meaning independent of speakers' intention in using them? For instance, if someone is charged with using a racist language, can that person accuse the critics of «reading meanings in» by denying the intention to be racist and offend anyone by that kind of language? Is it indeed possible not to be racist if one preempts a discourse string by a disclaimer «I'm not a racist, but...»?

Processing both literal and figurative language can be a risky undertaking since intentions in uttering some discourse string, which make all the difference in what meaning a speaker puts into his/her utterances, are of the implicit nature, known only to the speaker, sometimes only in retrospect or «post-dicto», and need to be guessed/recognized by the addressees in the process of online interpretation of utterances.

Sometimes hearers may not have the background information, which would provide necessary tools for recognizing the true intentions behind speaker's utterances as in the following example from where the University President is saying that Dr. Sheldon Cooper (who happens to be a workaholic theoretical physicist) is obligated to take a vacation:

Sheldon: But if I don't come in to work, what am I supposed to do with myself?

University President: Read, rest, travel. I hear Afghanistan is nice this time of year.

*Sheldon (turning to his friends): **Sarcasm?***

Howard: No, you should go!

(attested: «The Big Bang Theory» Season 05 Episode 16)

Here Sheldon is unsure whether to recognize President's utterance about Afghanistan as sarcastic or literally intended, since he has no frame of reference for what Afghanistan is like at that point as he spends most of his time doing research work in the laboratory and is oblivious to the ongoing war in that part of the world.

Both euphemisms and their axiological opposites, dysphemisms can be used for economy of expression as 'codes' and sometimes it is very difficult to establish the exact x-phemistic value of the expression with any degree of objectivity without taking sides. In order to assess the x-phemistic value of an expression (or rather its utterance), Allan & Burridge [1: 21] suggest the hypothetical context of being «polite to a casual acquaintance of the opposite sex in a formal situation in a middle class environment» as one in which a euphemism is likely to be used in place of a 'dispreferred' alternative. In naming the middle class politeness criterion(MCPC)as the one that establishes a default condition for assessing the x-phemistic value of an expression, Allan and Burridge view context as a situation-specific set of socio-cultural extra-linguistic factors.

Allan and Burridge's MCPC stems from the view of context as an objective social variable (along with such variables as social status, gender or age of speakers). Senichkina [6: 21] similarly takes into consideration the importance of socio-cultural variables in suggesting that it is possible to test whether a given linguistic unit is a euphemism by applying the following appropriateness conditions: imagining resorting to it while conversing with an interlocutor of a higher social status. It follows that if a unit is appropriate to use under certain circumstances, fulfills a softening (hedging) function and ameliorates the denotation, then the unit in question is a euphemism. We believe, however that when context is viewed from such a static perspective, an objective evaluation of an x-phemistic value or status of a linguistic unit becomes quite problematic as often judgments regarding what may or may not be appropriate in certain situations are individual and differ from person to person, let alone culture to culture or different periods of time.

This point can be illustrated by the example of a «politically charged» expression *anchor baby,* which according to the Double-Tongued Dictionary, is as a pejorative substitute for a lengthy «a child born of an immigrant in the United States, said to be a device by which a family can find legal foothold

in the US, since those children are automatically allowed to choose United States citizenship.» The term is generally demeaning to both children and their parents as such «nicknaming» is based on a dehumanizing metaphor ascribing human children functions of inanimate anchors, which is a derogatory reference to the supposed role of the child. It is interesting to note that the fifth edition of the New American Heritage Dictionary initially defined this term, considered to be a racist and deliberate effort to dehumanize immigrant children by many, as neutral:

Anchor Baby, n. A child born to a noncitizen mother in a country that grants automatic citizenship to children born on its soil, especially a child born to parents seeking to secure eventual citizenship for themselves and often other members of their family.

This sparked controversy in the media and later the label «offensive» was added to the entry in the online version of the dictionary by its editors to show that in uttering this expression speakers can and often do show their negative attitude to this phenomenon.

The role of intentionality (often referred to as 'context') in the interpretation of x-phemistic utterances is also debated outside of linguistic research literature, as seen from the following statement made by the US Supreme Court Justice John Roberts: «People understand <...> that the context matters. People understand that, including children, when they hear a bad word when someone hits their thumb with a hammer, they understand that's different than having an adult stand in normal conversation and use the words.» (attested: The Daily Show 26.01.2012)

To paraphrase this point using technical vocabulary adopted in linguistic research literature, the locution (the linguistic form of words uttered) can be at variance with the reference and illocutionary point of the utterance (i.e. what the speaker is doing in making the utterance). Allan and Burrdige [1], for instance, show that there are utterances (locutions), which are dysphemistic while the illocutionary point is euphemistic or 'dysphemistic euphemisms', e.g. calling a good friend an *old bastard*.

Similarly, research by Mateo and Yus [3] demonstrated that the use of dysphemisms can be motivated by several various types of intentionality ranging from offense- to interaction- to praise-centered. The act of swearing, or using the so-called «four-letter words», by itself is usually perceived to be dysphemistic and therefore tabooed; but by using an expression that is not intrinsically offensive, a speaker's dysphemistic intention can be accomplished euphemistically. The opposite is also possible – a euphemistic locution can turn out to have a dysphemistic illocutionary point as can be seen from the following example in which US President Barack Obama tells Jay Leno during his appearance on the «Tonight Show» (19.03.09) that he is a decent bowler and that he bowled a 129 score. Jay Leno sarcastically says: «That's very good, Mr. President.» At that comment by Leno, President Obama laughs and says: «it's like the Special Olympics or something.»

Here *Special Olympics* is a euphemism for *Olympic games for the physically handicapped* so Obama is actually saying that he bowled like an *invalid* by covering it up with an allegedly euphemistic *special Olympics*. However, in this case this particular expression will function as a dysphemistic euphemism since by using the euphemistic form, the speaker expresses a dysphemistic illocution (attitude):

Obama: I have been practicing bowling
Leno: Really
Obama: I bowled a 129
Leno: That's 'very good', Mr. President!
Obama: That's like Special Olympics or something. No, listen, I'm making progress on the bowling...
(attested: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXcgpZwsBPY)

The use of x-phemisms appears to be intentional in the sense that they are part of conscious linguistic behavior performed for special pragmatic purpose and one can't be x-phemistic by accident. In order for these strategic conscious communicative practices to work, the specific euphemistic intentionality/attitude underlying their use must be recognized and ascribed to speakers/writers by hearers/readers[1]. In order for a discourse string to give rise to the euphemistic effect, its addressees must recognize that a different, stronger and contextually inappropriate word or expressions could have been used instead of the one actually uttered, but was not due to considerations of saving face.

According to Gibbs [2: 109], there is no empirical evidence to support the claim that in the process of online interpretation hearers typically recognize any type of figurative language as some special type of discourse: «Thus, people do not unconsciously, or otherwise, label utterances as being «metaphoric», «idiomatic», «metonymic», «sarcastic» or otherwise as part of their fast-acting unconscious comprehension processes.» Gibbs [2: 110] quotes experimental studies that demonstrate that people may be greatly influenced by the figurative nature of certain arguments when making decisions, but have little conscious awareness, even when asked, of the type of language that shaped their thinking. Considering this, it is probably safe to assume that the same applies to euphemistic discourse: it does not normally come with the label «euphemistic» unless otherwise explicitly marked or «pre-empted» by such disclaimers as «euphemistically speaking», «diplomatically speaking» or «to be politically correct».

Thus, on the one hand, speakers' utterances can give rise to the «hedged/not saying it all» cognitive effects without being recognized and labeled as «euphemistic» by the hearers, while on the other, speakers can themselves signal that they have intentionally resorted to an x-phemistic expressions as specific type of linguistic devices in order to produce these cognitive effects.

While Rawson [4: 3] notes that euphemisms may be used unconsciously, according to him, instances of such a use include mainly linguistic units that were developed as euphemisms so long ago that hardly anyone remembers the original motivation. Rawson exemplifies this category by such now standard terms as *cemetery* (from the Greek word for 'sleeping place'), which replaced the more deathly *graveyard*.

It appears that any utterance is potentially open to interpretation and/or re-interpretation as euphemistic. Normally, the choice between alternatives depends entirely on context and intentionality, i.e. whether the speaker means the term to be euphemistic, and the hearer interprets it in that light as see from the following example from the show Desperate Housewives (Season 6 Episode 15):

Kathryn: Those two pigs confirmed what I've been thinking for a while now. I think it's time for me to give up on men.

Robyn: Oh, Amen, sister!

Kathryn: It's official. My dating days are over.

*Robyn: I mean you don't have to take it that far. You can always just do what I did and **explore other options**.*

K: What do you mean?

*R: **Cast a wider net? Expand the pool?** Date chicks...*

K: Oh, so you're a ...

R: Yep.

Explore other options, *cast a wider net* and *expand the pool* are used here as euphemisms for *become a lesbian*. Neither of these expressions is listed as a euphemism in dictionaries, let alone the silent placeholder '...' in the 'Oh, so you're a ...', yet all of them are immediately understood by the hearer by taking linguistic clues only as input to inferential processes responsible for recognition of the specific relevant speaker-intended meaning in this context.

The above view of x-phemistic communication can be summarized by saying that as the context in which utterances are interpreted makes all the difference, it would be more accurate to talk about euphemistic and dysphemistic interpretations rather than about this type of communication. Unlike certain grammatical classes, there is no natural class or category of linguistic units, which can be categorized as euphemisms or dysphemisms just like there are no intrinsically polite or impolite linguistic forms.

The erroneous view that there are intrinsically x-phemistic or (im)polite forms stems from the so-called code model of communication according to which speakers encode their messages into signals and the task of the hearer is to decode them. Considered from the perspective of online cognitive-pragmatic processing of utterances, politeness inheres not in forms, but in the attribution of polite intentions, and linguistic forms are only part of the evidence interlocutors use to interpret utterances and infer polite intentions. There is nothing intrinsically polite about any linguistic form as any linguistic device can express different meaning in different contexts.

From the cognitive-pragmatic point of view, words and expressions acquire meanings in certain contexts as part of hearers' recognition of the intentionality underlying what the speakers say. Since being euphemistic means behaving intentionally, such verbal behavior can be explained within the framework offered by bySperber and Wilson's [5] cognitive-pragmatic model of ostensive inferential communication known as Relevance Theory. According to Relevance Theory, coded semantic meanings of words are considered to be only inputs or clues to inferential processes which take into consideration relevance-driven recognition of speaker's intentions along with available or «manifest» contextual assumptions to yield fully propositional speaker meanings.

Unlike politeness assessments, during online processing of utterances containing lexical units capable of triggering x-phemistic interpretations, non-linguists or language users not familiar with the concept EUPHEMISM do not infer information about euphemistic status of an utterance as words and expressions do not carry a 'This is a euphemism' label in discourse. Rather, guided by the presumption of optimal relevance carried by all ostensive stimuli and utterances in particular, hearers will infer the underlying expression, which the euphemism is a substitute for, during online processing of utterances containing these linguistic units.

Thus, we suggest that in order to ascribe some discourse string the status of a euphemism, it is necessary to identify the tabooed referent behind the interpreted word or expressionas well as inferentially meta-represent the salient dispreferred alternative the euphemism was coined to replace, otherwise the euphemism will not be recognized as such. In order to be considered euphemistic, an

utterance must generate a specific 'cushioned blow' effect leading to the hearer holding assumptions about speaker's intentional evasiveness and evoking the feeling of 'not saying it all'.

Footnote

[1] Euphemisms can be used with a humorous/ironic attitude to what is said, for instance one can produce an ironic understatement «He is only a little tipsy» about someone who is completely drunk. On the issue of irony and intentionality see Gibbs [2: 104-115]

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Summary*. The article discusses the role of intentionality in the interpretation of x-phemistic utterances and argues that the x-phemistic value of utterances is not a property of the linguistic units used, but entirely depends on intentions underlying their use. A conclusion is made to the effect that this type of intentional communication can be best explained within the framework of Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory.*

Key words: *euphemisms, dysphemisms, intentionality, cognitive pragmatics, Relevance Theory.*

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THE LANGUAGE BEHIND TOLKIEN'S MYTHOLOGY

У статті робиться спроба встановити зв'язки між творами британського письменника-міфотворця Д.Р.Р. Толкіна та його академічною роботою як професора давньоанглійської мови. Доводиться, що в інтерпретації творів автора, в літературознавчому чи перекладознавчому аспектах, слід керуватися тим, що Толкін був перш за все лінгвістом, а потім письменником, відтак, лише знання витоків творчості автора та ретельний лінгвістичний аналіз його текстів може бути основою для можливих інтерпретацій та перекладів.

Ключові слова: джерела, лінгвістичний аналіз, інтерпретація, адекватний переклад.

What should one know before he/she attempts to translate J.R.R. Tolkiens creative works? The first thing to remember is that there were not two Tolkiens, one an academic and the other a writer. They were the same man, and the two sides of him overlapped so that they were indistinguishable. So if one is going to understand anything about his work as a writer he/she should spend some time examining Tolkien's scholarship.

Both Tolkien's academic career and his literary production are inseparable from his love of language and philology. He specialized in English philology at university and in 1915 graduated with Old Norse as special subject. He worked for **the Oxford English Dictionary** from 1918 and is credited with having worked on a number of words starting with the letter **W**, including **walrus**, over which he struggled mightily. In 1920, he became Reader in English Language at the University of Leeds. He gave courses in Old English heroic verse, history of English, various Old English and Middle English texts, Old and Middle English philology, introductory Germanic philology, Gothic, Old Icelandic, and Medieval Welsh. When in 1925, aged thirty-three, Tolkien applied for the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Pembroke College, Oxford, he boasted that his students of Germanic philology in Leeds had even formed a «Viking Club». He also had a certain, if imperfect, knowledge of Finnish.