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ON THE BROO: ON PRAGMATICS OF IDIOMS

Summary. The present article is an attempt to explore the pragmatics of idioms in the framework of Relevance Theory. Relevance Theory in idioms' pragmatics helps account for the perlocutionary force of idiomatic expressions. Apparently, the hearer/reader will always follow the path of least effort when trying to interpret the meaning of an unknown idiom. It is achieved through immediate satisfied after considering only a subset of the encyclopedic assumptions associated with the encoded concepts.

Key words: idioms, idiomaticity, pragmatics, Relevance Theory, perlocutionary effect, communication, concept.

Much of the focus of linguistic analysis, as J. Searle once noted, revolves around the sender's, as well as the recipient's ability to process, construct, and decode the meaning of communicative utterances, both in monocultural and cross-cultural setting [15, p. 110]. To begin with, of primary importance here is the notion of context, from which recipients derive their interpretations. Pragmatics, in this case, is the study of language in context, including knowledge, beliefs and intention of the speaker and the relationship between speaker and listener. However, assigning the correct or intended sense to idioms can be especially problematic for non-native speakers, because they may lack the cultural background knowledge on which native speakers draw. Although conceptualization does not lend itself to direct scrutiny, it can be studied indirectly via language as there is a close relationship between linguistic and conceptual structure.

As a rule, idioms are viewed as "a group of words established by usage having a meaning non deducible from the meaning of the individual words" [6; 7]; e. g. the idiomatic meaning of the expression *be in the doghouse* does not constitute its compositional meaning. However, unlike much of early scholarship on idioms, modern researches on idiom processing do not consider these units to be fixed or dead metaphors but rather units with some degree of metaphoricality [Cacciari and Tabossi 1993; Glucksberg 2001; Kövesces 2006; Langlotz 2006; Gibbs 2007; Naciscione 2010; Jaki 2014 et al.], that gives rise to a functional typology of idioms based on their degree of compositionality and semantic transparency (see: non-compositional idioms, fully compositional idioms, compositional-opaque idioms and quasi-metaphorical idioms). Likewise, Halliday 1985, as quoted by Fernando (1996) came up with the ideational, interpersonal and relational idioms. Thus, ideational idioms characterize the nature of a message. In a lexicalization approach, Swinney and Cutler advocate that when an unknown idiom is encountered, two sets of operations are activated: ordinary linguistic processing, including lexical access and syntactic parsing, and, simultaneously, retrieval from the phrasal lexicon where idioms-as-long-words are stored [20, p. 523]. Which of the two meanings – literal or idiomatic – appears first depends on the relative speed at which linguistic processing and lexical-idiom access can be completed. Therefore, familiar idioms are generally interpreted more quickly than are comparable literal expressions. However, as Vega Moreno points, the main problem with these models is that they

do not examine in any detail the pragmatic processes that enable these meanings to interact in on-line comprehension [21, p. 181].

The research is carried out in the framework of the contemporary Relevance Theory in pragmatics [17; 18] and its present path of lexical pragmatics [1; 16] and pragmatics of idioms [21].

The pragmatics of idioms, their syntactic behavior and creativity have been attended to in [2; 5; 8; 9; 13; 14]. According to J. Strässler, "a pragmatic analysis of language in general requires a completely different approach from that of a semantic or structural one. Whereas the latter can be based on the native speaker's intuition and language competence, the only way to get a valid picture of the function of elements is by analyzing recorded data" [19, p. 77]. Nevertheless, an idiomatic dictionary entry does provide ample information worth considering when doing a pragmatic analysis. Casas & Campoy argue that as far as the social relationships between interlocutors are concerned, it has to be pointed out that idioms are good indicators of the speaker's attitude towards the person(s) or events denoted [2, p. 54]. As a result, an idiom marked "formal" will tend to reflect a distant rather than close relationship, implying an official setting and suggesting a serious or elevated tone, while an idiom marked as "informal" will reflect a close rather a distant relationship, implying a domestic setting and suggesting an easy and relaxed tone.

Relevance theory in pragmatics argues that when communicating, humans use quite different modes of communication: coded communication and ostensive-inferential communication [18, p. 63]. Linguistic communication is hereby defined as a mixed process, implying both a coding-decoding device (the code model) and an inferential process based on old and new information (the inferential model) [16]. Accordingly, inostensive-inferential communication, a communicator produces a stimulus which makes it mutually manifest to communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions Sperber & Wilson [18, p. 63]. Consequently, information is relevant to you if it interacts in a certain way with your existing assumptions about the world. Therefore, when a hearer following the path of least effort arrives at an interpretation that satisfies his expectations of relevance, in the absence of contrary evidence, this is the most plausible hypothesis about the speaker's meaning.

In fact, Sperber and Wilson's model is one of cognitive cost-effectiveness, whereby a complex set of phenomena relating to communication and interpretation is reduced to a set of explanatory cognitive notions. The starting point here is the mind of an individual. Every individual holds a considerable set of assumptions, which are true for him or her. The assumptions, as Dor suggests, may encompass information on the immediate physical environment, expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses, religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, beliefs about the personal lives of our acquaintances, knowledge about politics and history, beliefs about our own emotions, fears and hopes, etc. [4, p. 699]. Assumptions, be they completely novel or easy to interpret, always unfold

in a context. The context is defined as a subset of assumptions that are accessible in individual's long-term memory. But how do these assumptions become accessible? Apparently, an individual deduces meanings through a series of comparisons involving the existing assumptions. What actually occurs is that the deductive device has to partially figure out the meaning of a new assumption, retrieve a specific subset of assumptions from long-term memory, store them in its own short-term memory, and then make the comparison [4, p. 699].

The **aim** of the present research is to conduct a pragmatic analysis of English idioms in the framework of Relevance Theory. Specifically, the paper sets out to examine and interpret the assumptions individuals hold in their mind and turn to when encountered with unfamiliar idioms.

One might clearly infer that, when scrutinized in terms of relevance, idioms do conform to the *principle of economy* in discourse: speakers do not have to say what is presupposed to be true; that is, information belonging to the common ground. Sperber and Wilson argue that common ground defined as mutual knowledge can be neither a necessary condition (otherwise communication would always be successful) nor a sufficient one (because background information can be inferred) for successful communication. Therefore, according to J. Moeschler, in verbal communication, the normal state is one in which the intended meaning is not literally communicated (and therefore not fully economical), but pragmatically inferred from (and therefore contingent on) contextual information and the utterance [10].

As a matter of fact, Relevance Theory principles were applied in the pragmatic analysis of idioms by R. E. Vega Moreno [21]. With regard to idioms, she maintains that following a path of least effort, the hearer takes the encoded concepts as a starting point to derive the speaker's meaning. A consequence of taking the path of least effort is that s/he often finds his or her expectations of relevance satisfied after considering only a subset of the encyclopedic assumptions associated with the encoded concepts [21, p. 182].

Study the following examples:

Obama wasn't the only big Democrat to mysteriously abandon his position on single-payer. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Rep. Henry Waxman, the influential chair of the House commerce committee, have both backed away from their longtime support of single-payer. Hell, even Max-freaking-Baucus once conceded the logic of single-payer, saying only that it isn't feasible politically. "There may come a time when we can push for single-payer," he said in February. "At this time, it's not going to get to first base in Congress. "And helping it not get to first base was... Max Baucus. It was Baucus' own committee that held the first round-table discussions on reform. In three days of hearings last May, he invited no fewer than 41 people to speak. The list featured all the usual industry hacks, including big insurers like America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), Blue Cross and Aetna.

I have been convinced that it would be a mistake to send additional troops to Iraq. I believe that this is one of the most important issues facing our nation and that it is important for the Senate to go on record in opposition to the president's plan. "Collins continued: "It is my hope that the leadership will soon work out an agreement that will allow us to have a vote as soon as possible. "According to one senior Democratic aide, Reid left the Capitol last night confident that he is holding a winning hand. Negotiations between party leaders are expected to continue today, and Reid promised that the Senate will return to Iraq over and over until Democrats get a clean vote. "Today, Senator McConnell led his Republican troops off a cliff," said Sen. Charles E. Schumer (N.Y.), the primary architect of the Democrats' takeover of the Senate in November.

In (1), the hearer, assuming the path of least effort, first, will compare the literal meaning of the expression with the existing subset of assumptions. Given baseball origins of the idiom, the hearer may either infer the idiom's meaning "to make a major advance with someone or something" relatively easily or construct a concept related to a situation of achieving something important or being successful in something. In (2), the hearer might derive the meaning of the idiomatic expression inferring from the lexical semantics of the individual lexemes in the idiom: in a boxing match, the referee holds the hand of a winning boxer. These, however, are transparent idioms, i.e. idioms with fairly predictive meanings easily arrived at subject to encyclopedic background of the hearer. The information is partially novel to the hearer and his/her processing times required to comprehend idioms' semantics are comparatively short.

Let us now examine more opaque idioms in context:

She sent it on to me and it read, Your resume contains too many errors to forward to the president for consideration. 'Even I felt upset about this response. So what did I do? I responded to the person who replied to my girlfriend. I wasn't rude, exactly, but I said this was rude and it was patronizing and that I hoped they treated their customers better than their potential employees. I admitted that I did this and now I'm in the doghouse. What can I say or do to get out? I mean, I was only sticking up for her. Oh, and I used her e-mail to send it. Signed, Saint Bernard. Ms-MARGO-HOWARD-1: Dear Saint, well of course you used her e-mail to send it; yours would have meant nothing. As to how to exit your canine quarters, point out to her that because she had already been turned down the situation was one of no harm, no foul.

He'd also toss her an occasional leftover pack of smokes. Marlboro Lights was her brand, but she wasn't picky— not about cigarettes, anyway. (Now men, she'd joke— don't even ask.) After that he'd hang around and have a couple of beers with her, shoot the breeze. One time when she had no customers, he'd brought in the rest of his week's take, plugged in his coin-sorter and let her help him stackwrap the profits. She really seemed to like it, just made her eyes light up his whole afternoon. When they were done, had all the coins rolled up neat and tidy, ready to deposit in the county bank down in Carmi, she slipped a hand over his and gave it a squeeze.

The above instantial uses of the idioms would not benefit the hearer to develop the exact meaning of being in a state of disgrace or disfavour as in (3). Neither would the conventional (encyclopedic) knowledge about shooting the breeze as in (4) contribute to hearer's deriving the meaning of having an informal conversation. When dealing with these idioms, initially, the hearer may search for some relevant encyclopedic assumptions related to the plausible explanations of the idioms' content. However, pursuing the path of least effort would not help him make the utterance relevant. Therefore, the hearer (reader) may construct an inferential concept IN THE DOGHOUSE related to the state of trouble, under-management and poor service quality. Similarly, s/he may broaden the sense of the unknown idiom (shoot the breeze) to behaving in a relaxed way or simply having a good time. On the other hand, failing to get any reasonable or satisfactory assumption, the hearer may need to learn idioms' meanings impromptu. As indicated, constructing new concepts or adapting unknown idioms to new contexts requires substantial mental effort from the hearer, which may result in longer interpretation and processing times of idioms.

In addition, Vega-Moreno argues that "a feature of idioms, even the most opaque ones, is that, unlike lexical items, they are generally composed of words which are familiar to the hearer" [21]. This assumption is, however, only true to some extent. Evidently, each national variety of English incorporates culture-specific idioms, e. g.

Most Internet Marketing Service providers are just “marketers” or are just “techos” resulting in them providing sub-standard advice to you the business owner/entrepreneurs because they only give the part of the picture that they know. This results in you feeling frustrated at splashing out big bickies for websites that are pretty but just don't work, or sales websites that are effective but don't have enough traffic to make them pay their way.

Stuart Banks did not have high expectations when jobcentre staff offered him the chance to join a hospitality training course at Dumfries House last year. He had few skills and little job experience beyond a string of temporary contracts, mainly in call centres. “I went along expecting just to get a couple of little job qualifications and then be back on the broo again,” says Banks, 24, using a Scots expression for unemployment benefit.

The examples above feature Australian English and Scottish English idioms. However, they are not composed of lexical items, which are familiar to an average hearer. Thus, *bickies* stands for an Australian English abbreviation for *biscuits*, whereas *broo* is labour exchange or social security office in Scotland. As mentioned, the hearer will need to learn meanings of the relevant idioms, due to culture-specific usage/distortion of lexical items. On the other hand, speaker (writer) may be well aware of potential difficulties in interpreting completely fuzzy idioms, like *on the broo*, and, hence, provide additional explanation of its meaning in context, i.e.: *on the broo again – Scots expression for unemployment benefit.*

In the final analysis, there are several points to be emphasized.

Relevance Theory in pragmatics helps process the perlocutionary effect of idiomatic expressions. According to the Relevance Theory, the hearer/reader will always follow the path of least effort when trying to interpret the meaning of an unknown lexeme or idiom. In the case of idioms, interpretation is always possible when their meanings are transparent to some degree, and, thus, seem analyzable and decomposable for the hearer. Assuming that the hearer comes across an idiom which is opaque (pure idiom), the interpretation may result in constructing a new concept, often with broader sense, or learning the true meaning of an idiom. Additionally, speakers, when anticipating possible complexities with idiomatic interpretation on the hearer's part, make sure extra information aimed at discerning the true meaning of an idiom is given.

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Ковалюк Ю. В. On the broo: до питання про прагматику ідіом

Анотація. У статті здійснено спробу описати прагматику ідіом з погляду теорії релевантності. Теорія релевантності в ідіоматиці дає змогу витлумачити перлокутивний ефект ідіом. Відповідно, реципієнт (слухач або читач) завжди обиратиме шлях найменшого опору під час інтерпретації значення невідомої лексеми чи ідіому. Це відбувається в результаті відбору низки асоціативних ознак, пов'язаних із закодованими концептами.

Ключові слова: ідіоми, ідіоматика, прагматика, теорія релевантності, перлокутивний ефект, комунікація, концепт.

Ковалюк Ю. В. On the broo: к вопросу о прагматике идиом

Аннотация. В статье сделана попытка описать прагматику идиом с точки зрения теории релевантности. Теория релевантности в идиоматике позволяет рассмотреть перлокутивный эффект идиом. Следовательно, реципиент (слушатель или читатель) всегда будет выбирать способ наименьшего противодействия при интерпретации значения неизвестной лексеми или идиомы. Это происходит в результате отбора ряда ассоциативных признаков, связанных с кодированными концептами.

Ключевые слова: идиомы, идиоматика, прагматика, теория релевантности, перлокутивный эффект, коммуникация, концепт.