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## The Pragmatic Component of Semantics and Its Role in Media Texts

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### Abstract

The pragmatic meanings of widely used nominations are the result of the constant dynamics of socio-cultural values. Word pragmatics knowledge makes it possible for the media text author to adequately implement intentions using various markers of their expression, and for the reader to interpret the intentions of the text author such as non-literal meaning, irony, pejorativeness or, conversely, meliorativeness. The pragmatic components should include such parameters of the word as its compliance/non-compliance with the spirit of time, fashion.

The article analyzes the types of pragmatic components in the meaning of linguistic units based on the material of modern media texts, shows the dynamics of pragmatic connotations depending on socio-cultural conditions. The use of contextual and sociolinguistic analysis was chosen, as well as methods such as observation and interpretation, a synchronous-descriptive approach was used, as well as elements of diachronic description (to detect the dynamics of pragmatic meanings).

The pragmatic component of semantics plays an important role in generating a media text, since the social co-meaning of a linguistic unit accompanying the subject-logical content turns out to be extremely significant. As it has been shown, in the collective linguistic consciousness there really exist words-pragmeme expressing all these important characteristics.

**Keywords:** communication, linguistic pragmatics, pragme, semantic content, connotations, meliorative, pejorative, media discourse.

### 1. Introduction

In the Morris three-part system of properties of linguistic signs (Morris, 2001), semantics and syntactics are most unambiguously understood, while pragmatics is interpreted extremely broadly. These are the speech functions of the sign, its evaluation by communicants, and the patterns of speech communication in general. After the works by Yu.D. Apresyan (Apresyan, 1992; 1995, etc.) in Russian linguistics, the understanding of pragmatics as a modal and evaluative semantics fixed in the language system – in the means of different levels, which the speaker/writer puts into the content of the utterance has been established.

This relation is “embedded” in the content of language units. The pragmatic component is the most mobile part of the sign content, depending on many extralinguistic conditions in generating the text. Lack of knowledge or ignoring of pragmatic components (Finke, 2018) is an important the linguoecological problem (Stoletova, 2021).

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At the present stage of media linguistics development, it is relevant to determine the linguoecological parameters of the media text, and it is necessary for this to clarify the features of the implementation of the pragmatic component of the semantics of multi-level units in the media space. The pragmatic component of semantics can be actualized or intentionally neutralized by the media text author. It is possible with this research perspective to clarify the typology of media texts based on the integration of linguoecological and linguopragmatic parameters. Moreover, integration should also concern the semiotic parameter, since the pragmatic component of semantics will provide determining the specifics of the unit in the sign function.

## 2. Materials and methods

The article analyzes the types of pragmatic components in the content of linguistic units based on the material of modern media texts, shows the dynamics of pragmatic connotations depending on socio-cultural conditions. The use of contextual and sociolinguistic analysis was chosen, as well as methods such as observation and interpretation, a synchronous-descriptive approach was used, as well as elements of diachronic description (to detect the dynamics of pragmatic meanings).

## 3. Discussion

Even in the works by Yu.D. Apresyan in the 90-s of the XX century, pragmatic synonyms, words with a common conceptual content, but differing in evaluative pragmatic components such as *soratnik* (comrade in arms, like-minded person – the word with meliorative connotation), *souchastnik* (someone who participates or participated together with somebody in a crime, the word with pejorative connotation used in official style), *podel'nik* (someone who is on the same criminal case, the jargon word with pejorative connotation) were analysed. The differentiation of such pragmatic synonyms turns out to be extremely urgent in modern media communication.

For example:

*And the Soviet Union went into oblivion. It left, not without slamming the door because the number of direct and indirect victims of the country collapse is millions, not bloodless at all, as some liberal ideologists claim. It left, realizing its uselessness to both Russian society and the peoples of newly independent countries, enthusiastically shared – and still continue to share – the inheritance created in Soviet times. Not only industrial, but also cultural, social...one. Not understanding the difference between inheritance and heritage. Not realizing that these cyclopean factories, these cities beyond the Arctic Circle, these channels in deserts and steppes are the result of an attempt to create a new Human being. And the maximum that an “ordinary person”, a person of the capitalist sociality world, is capable of is to use the inheritance while he/she is working, and then to cut it into metal and sell it for scrap in Bangladesh (Evstafiev, 2023: 3).*

A huge number of media article are devoted to the differentiation of *medical pomoshch'* (help) and *medical usluga* (services):

*After all, there was medical pomoshch' (help, care) in the USSR. And today – and this is the trouble – medical obsluzhivanie (services). It's not just a sign change! This devalues the meaning of the doctor's work, excluding from it that spiritual component of calmness, for which patients often turn to us. Isn't it strange that only against the background of the pandemic respect for doctors has returned? It should be daily, integral in the life of every member of society (Buziashvili, 2020: 8).*

The same topic is devoted to the article by A. Chuikov “Back to the future”, which has the subtitle “Uslugi (services) or sluzhenie (serving, solemn word)” (Chuikov, 2021: 7).

The word *usluga* (service) is also called “hateful” when it is applied to another important area of social life – education. For example, the title of the editorial article on the first page of the “Literary Newspaper”: “Uslugam (services) zdes' ne mesto (have no place here)”

Lead: *The hateful term is excluded from the educational laws.*

*The most pleasant news for teachers is that the hated term “educational services” has been excluded from the laws.*

*“Usluzhlivaya (obsequious)” school is a thing of the past (Uslugam..., 2022: 1).*

It is interesting that the expression “educational services”, which became popular in the 90s, in relation to secondary and higher schools, only in the most recent years began to be evaluated sharply negatively. It became obvious that education (and the upbringing that is inseparable to it)

cannot be equated with household services and on such basis to build a relationship between teachers and pupils: this leads to the degradation of society, to social catastrophe. Today, society is making every effort to return the attitude to the activity of the teacher as a great mission.

The pragmatic component of the content can cardinaly affect the semantics of a socio-political term (Boulianne, 2019; Kang et al., 2022; Lane, 2020; Langer, Gruber, 2021; Manca, 2020; Wenzel, 2019), as it happened with the originally meliorative Latinism *optimizatsiya* (optimization):

*It seems that the word “optimization” is becoming as abusive in our country as “perestroika” (restructuring) (Ivanov, 2022: 16).* Derivatives are also marked by negative connotations – *optimizirovat’* (optimize), *dooptimizirovalis’* (optimized down – the word with negative connotation), *optimizatory* (optimizers – the word with negative connotation), because they all turned out to be associated with negative processes such as the reduction of hospitals, schools, etc. (for more information about pragmatic enantiosema based on this term (Kulikova, 2022).

On the contrary, the fate of some Soviet-era pejoratives turned out to be different: if they did not get a meliorative connotation, but in any case they began to be perceived as neutral. The words *kar’era* (career), *kar’erist* (careerist) especially the first one clearly “rose in rank”:

Gennady Zyuganov: *When I studied at Orel Teachers Training Institute, I spent the time between lectures at the board with “Komsomolka” (the informal title of the newspaper “Komsomol'skaya Pravda” (Komsomol Truth) opposite the rector's office. They noticed me there and promoted to komsomol work. And the party kar’era (career) was formed thanks to the “KP” (Zyuganov, 2022: 3).*

If the Communist leader started talking about his “party *kar’era* (career)”, it is clear that there has been a significant shift in the pragmatic content of this word.

Not taking into consideration pragmatic connotations can make communication conflict:

*No less wild was the statement of the popular bard Vadim Mishchuk about the “khozyain (owner)” of the festival. As it turned out, the festival has an “khozyain (owner)”?! It is hardly possible to come up with a greater disrespect for the hundreds of enthusiastic social activists who have started and continue to make this song festival for decades.*

*It is especially annoying that the presenter could not or did not want to talk in detail with Lyudmila Averyanova, who was found by the Club and appeared for the first time at the festival glade during the Youth Grushinsky in August last year. She is the only living witness of that tragedy on the Ude River... (Shemshuchenko, 2023: 28).*

Indeed, such a large-scale cultural event as a music festival may have an *organizator* (organizer), *rukovoditel’* (leader), even *sponsor* (sponsor), but the word “*khozyain* (owner)” is hardly appropriate here and naturally causes bewilderment, even resentment of the participants.

The pragmatic component of the content can mark an entire epoch (Golan et al., 2019; Jang, Kim, 2018; Shin et al., 2022; Van Duyn, Collier, 2019), which is characterized by one or another lexeme:

*Who does not remember the enchanting rise of Zuleikha – an extremely dubious book both from the point of view of literary merits and historical truth! But why and what for did this happen, why did a poor text about billions of repressed people, hinting at the universal guilt of Russians for totalitarianism, collect not just all the literary laurels, but also was awarded by the prize of the government of the Russian Federation? Who needed and benefited from it?*

*It should be used such an expressive word from the recent past – vreditel'stvo (wrecking). On the one hand, all these, God forgive me, Zuleikha's promoters seem to have fallen asleep on a stack of magazines “Ogonyok” – someone has long dealt with billions of people shot, someone is simply not interested. But on the other hand, such literature hits the target, instilling horror and disgust for the past, thereby destroying the “national identity” and contributing to the undermining of state sovereignty (Zamlelova, 2022: 32).*

- *It seems that you are promoting the idea of a kind of ‘cultural commissars (inspectors)’ who would “look after” different cultural trends?*

- *The word “commissar (inspector)” immediately begins to scare people away. Give it another name! (Interview..., 2022: 12).*

It is clear that in order to catch this kind of “pragmatic signals”, we need “cultural memory” – that is called background knowledge or presuppositions. These signals are so subtle that they are not always felt even by knowledgeable people. From history, everyone remembers the wording

“Molotov-Ribbentrop pakt (pact)”, and the word “pakt (pact)” was not perceived as an explicit pragmeme:

*“Molotov-Ribbentrop pakt (pact)”. It must be admitted that even your propagandists repeat this word: pakt (pact). And it was invented by the anti-Soviets. In fact, this is an ordinary contract. The same as Munich, Polish or French one. No, you call it a pakt (pact) because you don't understand anything about propaganda. And you don't take words into consideration. And you are not defending either your honour or your truth.*

*You have a rich history, it is remarkable in many aspects, colossal achievements – it is both objective and subjective. Why don't your people know this or don't talk about it? Why is the whole history of the USSR camps? Yes, they were, it is necessary to know and remember, but politically it was a small part, and they did not solve all the problems. What was the state, what did it become and why – these are the main questions. <...> No army in the world had its own Stalingrad, Brest Fortress. The words “I'm dying, but I'm not giving up” are written in blood only in Russian. No one has ever written this in any other language. And this is a huge difference. This is what gives strength to Russia (Interview..., 2021: 3).*

*No dictionary has information that the word pakt (pact) has a pejorative meaning.*

*On the contrary, explanatory dictionaries give the mark “official”, that is, they indicate the absence of evaluative connotations. In general, the poor pragmatic information in explanatory dictionaries is a separate big problem not only of domestic lexicography. And this has objective prerequisites, since the pragmatic content of the lexeme is not always perceived identically by all the representatives of the linguistic culture – there are differences due to age, social status, ideology, political views, etc.*

A liberal reader may notice the irony in the article by A. Prokhanov titled “Koreiskie svetochi” (Korean Lights) (Prokhanov, 2022: 2), accompanied by photographs of Kim Ir Sen and Kim Chen Ira:

*Nature has endowed North Korea with vozhd' (leader). He was sent to the people of the North KOREA by heaven. The vozhd' (leader) is the tip of the story. Kim Ir Sen is a diamond pointed tip that rushes into the distance of centuries, leads his people, and they overcome the most terrible obstacles, fly to the great future, shining future.*

It is clear that the attitude of the A. Prokhanov's followers and those who do not share his political views and who are not fans of the newspaper “Tomorrow” style to the text as a whole and to the pragmatic component of the phrase “Koreiskie svetochi” (Korean Lights) will be different.

And such differences constitute one of the difficulties of lexicographical representation of pragmatic information.

#### 4. Results

Thus, the pragmatic content of the lexeme is the most important component of semantics, without which full-fledged communication is impossible. This component can radically differ even in single-root formations. The “morphologically gifted” Russian language actively uses affixes to form pragmatic information. Yu.D. Apresyan noticed that the so-called diminutive suffix can, for example, express good attitude towards the speech addressee and it can not be connected with the denotation: the expressions *skushai kashki* (eat porridge – in addressing a baby), *vypei molochka* (drink milk – in addressing a baby) convey a tender attitude to the addressee, and not to porridge and milk. For example aphorism from the humorous page of the “Literary Newspaper”: *Ne nado putat'* (Do not confuse): *nogi* (legs) – *ehto to, chem khodyat* (are what they walk with), *a nozhki* (diminutive from legs) – *ehto to, chem lyubuyutsya* (are what they admire) (Kuvykin, 2022: 32).

Suffixal pejoratives from neutral source words are widespread, for example:

*He enriched the Russian language by the term “zhurnalyugi” (journalists – the pejorative), it was these scavengers who first came like bees, catching the scent of death: “The real reason for leaving is named...”, “Who will get the legacy of Gradsky?”... “zhurnalyugi” (journalists – the pejorative) continue to call Alexander Borisovich “the father of Russian rock”, despite the fact that Gradsky himself repeated many times that there was no any Russian rock. You can't exactly attribute him to show business, because Gradsky was a consistent antagonist of this ugly phenomenon by its nature (Pukhnavtsev, 2021: 22)*

In relation to the pragmatics of some elements, society demonstrates uniformity of opinions, in relation to others, on the contrary, disunity. So, they unanimously condemned (both linguists and the general public) the abbreviation GPW (Great Patriotic War):

*Let's remember the attempt of the commanders of the Great Patriotic War (it was just then called disparagingly – VOV (GPW) to present such incompetent krovoprolivtsy (the bloodshed – the pejorative)! (Polyakov, 2019: 483).*

A lot of opinions about the “most offensive abbreviation”, which was called “wild”, “barbaric” were presented in the research by N. Eskova (Eskova, 2000). The reason for this phenomenon is generally understandable, if we keep in mind that respectful communication is a sphere of strong iconism. For example, etiquette respectful formulas are always extended syntagmas, laconism of abbreviations is not in demand here (see for more details: Cherneyko, Li, 2020; Kulikova, Svetlichnaya, 2021; Zholtikova, 2017). According to our observations, this abbreviation has disappeared from the media space in recent years.

The attitude to the pragmatics of the latest Anglo-Americanisms in the Russian language is quite ambiguous. For some, it is “foreign chuzhebesie (foreignness)”, “violence against language”, etc. (Gutorova, 2016; Kravchenko, 2021; Kravchenko, Boiko, 2013), breaking the ethical and speech standards of the Russian language (Brusenskaya et al., 2022), for others these are current and buzz words. If we take into consideration that at least half of the vocabulary of all the dictionaries of buzz words published by Vl. Novikov during 20 years are Anglo-Americanisms, society is quite tolerant to borrowing (of course, it is important to analyse the usefulness and relevance in each particular case). For example, typical reflections on Anglicisms:

*And now, in modern terms, in the nearest future it will be apgreid (upgrade) of performances. Every performance is a living matter. It gets either better or worse. We don't let the performances get worse. They should get better, including at the expense of the artists included in the performance (Shablinskaya, 2021: 19); ... it seems that without realizing it, keeping in mind a completely different scale of the vision, we became the initiators – or you can use a buzzword, trigger (trigger) – of some large-scale, global process affecting the entire planet (Vlasov, 2023: 2).*

And it is unlikely that the latest ideas of “verbal import substitution” will significantly change the situation with the main array of Anglo-Americanisms. The mass nature of borrowings itself indirectly confirms their importance in the Russian language at the present stage, since it can be assumed that they serve as widely understood communicative good. Of course, their functioning can be evaluated as successful or unsuccessful.

The choice of a native Russian or borrowed word under the influence of the ideas of “linguistic import substitution” should become more motivated and answerable.

Thus, the choice of a linguistic unit with certain pragmatic component of semantics in media text is determined by the linguoecological parameters formed in the linguoculture, as well as by the intentions of the author, who should theoretically focus on these parameters. It is these parameters that can determine the actualization or neutralization of the pragmatic component of semantics in various types of media texts (from analytics to essays), which is also due to the parameters of the initial objectivity/subjectivity of the media text.

The pragmatic component of semantics is actualized as a result of the reflection of the sender and recipient about the use of traditional linguistic units in a new contextual environment that can create different transformations of the unit semantics. Such use can be evaluated positively or negatively from the stand point of the dominant linguoecological parameter such as ethical and speech standards.

If such use becomes regular, it is possible to fix the predicted evaluative associations connected with a specific linguistic unit, which in the future may lead to a change in a certain fragment of the cognitive and communicative space of linguoculture (at first it will concern individual cognitive and communicative spaces reflecting the peculiarities of linguistic consciousness).

## 5. Conclusion

Thus, the pragmatic component of semantics plays an important role in generating a media text, since the social co-meaning of a linguistic unit accompanying the subject-logical content turns out to be extremely significant. Word pragmatics knowledge makes it possible for the media text author to adequately implement intentions using various markers of their expression, and for the reader to interpret the intentions of the text author such as non-literal meaning, irony, pejorativeness or, conversely, meliorativeness. The pragmatic components should include such parameters of the word as its compliance / non-compliance with the spirit of the epoch, fashion.

As it has been shown, in the collective linguistic consciousness there really exist words-pragmemes expressing all these characteristics.

Thus, for pragmemes, the pragmatic component of semantics is dominant, in other linguistic units it can be actualized or neutralized in accordance with the intentions of the media text author, but the media text type may impose certain restrictions on such semantic processes. These restrictions can also be overcome by consistent compliance with linguistic and ecological parameters or intentional deviation from them, in particular, ethical and speech standards. In case of deviation from the ethical and speech standards, the media text, which presents units with a pragmatic component of semantics, may get a manipulative essence. With an excessive concentration of such texts in the media space, a gradual transformation of the key elements of the collective linguistic consciousness is possible. Such changes can significantly affect the processes of interpretation and evaluation of media texts by the recipient (both collective and individualized ones). The specifics of the use of units with a pragmatic component of semantics in media texts can influence the formation of trends in creation and perception of media texts at a certain stage of the development of the cognitive and communicative space of a particular linguistic culture.

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