

French-Spanish-Russian Pragmatemes Dictionary

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Abstract

This paper relates, firstly, about pragmatemes, expressions restricted by the extralinguistic situation. Secondly, it deals with a contrastive approach to the study and shows semantic, pragmatic and cultural peculiarities of Russian, French and Spanish pragmatemes. Pragmatemes are very important in everyday life: we use them as greetings and civilities; we read them on signs, posters and packages. Therefore these stereotypical utterances are required at initial levels of foreign language acquisition. We propose a dictionary of pragmatemes in French, Spanish and Russian for beginner and intermediate students. All expressions are divided into 14 thematic groups. The microstructure of the dictionary contains the information about the conceptual representation, the situation in which a pragmateme occurs, its variants and synonyms.

Keywords

Phraseme; pragmateme; Meaning-Text theory; contrastive studies; teaching and acquisition of foreign languages.

1 Introduction

Push/Pull, No parking, Bon appetit! Best before and etc. We use these expressions in everyday life. We pronounce them as greetings and civilities; we read them on signs, posters and packages.

They are pragmatemes. According to Mel'čuk people do not speak most of the time in words but in phrasemes (Mel'čuk *et al.*, 1995). Unlike the case of semantic phrasemes (idioms, clichés, collocations), pragmatic phrasemes (pragmatemes) do not attract particular attention of lexicographers. However their study and description could be useful in applied linguistics,

specifically in foreign language teaching. The application of a contrastive analysis of pragmatemes will provide empiric results and reveal new aspect of the phenomenon. We propose a dictionary of pragmatemes in French, Spanish and Russian for learners of initial levels of foreign language acquisition.

2 Notion of “pragmateme”

I. Mel'čuk was the first to introduce the term of “pragmateme” and to give a fundamental approach to their study (Mel'čuk, 1998).

With regards to the notion of “pragmateme”, we proceeded from the definition proposed by I. Mel'čuk who considers a pragmateme as “a compositional phraseme, if it is restricted in its signified and its signifier by the extralinguistic situation in which this phraseme is used” (Mel'čuk, to appear). We extend this definition.

By the term “pragmateme” we mean not only compositional phrasemes, but also a linguistic sign pragmatically bound by a its situation of use. Thus, a pragmateme can be represented by a single lexical unit, a phrase, or a sentence:

- a lexical unit: Sp. ¡*Jesus!* [to someone sneezing];
- a phrase: Rus. *Парковка запрещена* (Parking prohibited¹) [on a road sign];
- a sentence: Fr. *Pour votre sécurité, ce lieu est sous video surveillance* (For your safety, these premises are under video surveillance) [dans un espace public].

We consider this broad definition justified because in different languages both a single lexical unit and a multilexemic expression can correspond to the same conceptual representation in the same situation. Cf.: Fr. *Silence* and Rus. *Соблюдайте тишину* (Respect the silence) [on a sign in the library].

2. 1 Synonyms of pragmatemes

The extralinguistic situation determines the choice of an appropriate meaning or, sometimes, several meanings.

For example, in public places, in libraries, museums, theatres, there is a sign prohibiting the usage of mobile phones. The prohibition can be expressed differently: Sp. *Mantengan desconectados los teléfonos móviles* (Keep your mobile phones disconnected) and *Prohibido el uso del teléfono móvil dentro del recinto* (The use of mobile phones is prohibited on the premises) [on a sign].

¹ Throughout the work we will use brackets to provide the literal translation of the given pragmatemes in English.

In France, the access to the premises reserved for staff in restaurants or hotels is restricted by signs: Fr. *Interdit au public* (Prohibited to public) and *Entrée de service* (Service entry) [on a door]. These utterances are interchangeable and can appear both in the situation in question.

Thus, for the same extralinguistic situation and the same conceptual representation, two (or more) possible utterances exist. In this case we deal with *synonyms* of pragmatemes.

2. 2 Variants of pragmatemes

In the cases when the signifier of a pragmateme varies (on a syntactic, lexical, morphological or phonetic level) we speak about its *variants*, for instance:

Fr. *Ne pas donner de la nourriture aux animaux* (Do not give food to the animals) or *Ne pas nourrir les animaux* (Do not feed the animals) [on a sign in the zoo]. Here we have a periphrasis *nourrir* (to feed) – *donner de la nourriture* (to give food).

Rus. When someone sneezes, in Russian there are two manners to react according to the relationship with this person: *Будь здоров!* (Be healthy) is informal and *Будьте здоровы!* is formal (Be healthy) [to someone sneezing]. The difference is morphological – a formal form needs appropriate suffixes.

However, these expressions will always have a high level of restriction. For instance, when someone goes travelling, in French people say *Bon voyage!* (Good trip). Such grammatically correct phrases as [#]*Joyeuse route* (Happy way) or [#]*Joyeux voyage* (Happy trip) would be considered unacceptable by French native speakers. It exemplifies the phraseological character of pragmatemes.

3 Contrastive Study of Pragmatemes

During our research we collected an empirical data of 1000 pragmatemes in Russian, French and Spanish. It gave the possibility to compare equivalents in three languages, their semantic representations and the peculiarities of their usage. We revealed several differences in equivalent pragmatemes, detected pragmatemes specific for some languages and thus lacunas in others.

3. 1 Semantic differences

For the same situation and conceptual representation we encounter pragmatemes with different semantic representations. For instance, in France a sign near a lawn the expression prohibiting the walk on a lawn says *Respecter la pelouse* (Respect the lawn) whereas in Spanish it is *Prohibido pisar el césped* (It is prohibited to walk on the lawn). The Russian equivalent is *По газонам не ходить* (On the lawn not to walk). The difference consists of the choice of verbs to express the prohibition of walking on a lawn: in French – *respecter* (to respect), in Spanish – *prohibido* (is prohibited) and in Russian – *не ходить* (not to walk).

The Russian pragmateme which denotes that a bus does not take passengers and goes to the depot is *Автобус идет в парк* (The bus is going to the depot). In France and Spain the corresponding text is Fr. *Hors service*, Sp. *Fuera de servicio* (Out of service).

These are examples of the interlingual synonymy.

3. 2 Pragmatic differences

Another difference concerns the usage of pragmatemes. In both French and Spanish there are greetings which mean “Good day”. Although the French pragmateme *Bonjour!* is used from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m., the Spanish equivalent *¡Buenos dias!* (Good day) is used until midday and then *¡Buenas tardes!* (Good afternoon) is used. In Russian the pragmateme *Добрый день!* which literally corresponds to “Good day” or “Good afternoon” is used from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the morning (from 5 a.m. to 11 a.m.) the greeting is *Доброе утро!* (Good morning) is used. Therefore the French *Bonjour!* has the largest temporal usage among these three languages. The description of these of these expressions needs additional pragmatic information, like time of the use.

3. 3. Specific pragmatemes

The contrastive study of pragmatemes reveals the existence of expressions specific to some languages and of course cultures. For example, the French pragmateme found in trains *En cas d'affluence ne pas utiliser les strapontins* (In the case of rush hours do not use strapontins)[on a sign, in a carriage]. There are no strapontins neither in Russian nor in Spanish trains and that is why it is a lacuna in both languages.

Rainy weather and frequent mud in the streets is the source of the Russian pragmateme *Пожалуйста! Вытирайте ноги* (Please! Wipe your feet). This sign appears on the doors of shops, banks, schools, universities during cold, rainy or snowy seasons. We did not find an equivalent neither in France nor in Spain.

The Russian greeting to a person who has just taken a bath *С легким паром!* means approximately “I hope you have had a nice bath”. This expression is specific to Russian culture and refers to the old tradition of taking a steam bath (banya). This pragmateme has no equivalent in either French or Spanish.

There are no symmetric languages with perfectly corresponding equivalents. The examined examples show that sometimes, in the same situation, different languages use expressions with different semantics. Sometimes there are some pragmatic differences in the use of pragmatemes. Specific cultural pragmatemes present great interest for linguists in contrastive studies. The provision of all peculiarities of pragmatemes is very important especially in the teaching and acquisition of foreign languages.

4 Pragmatemes Dictionary

As we have previously shown, pragmatemes have many semantic and cultural nuances. Their functioning is rather complex and depends on many pragmatic factors.

The knowledge of stereotypical utterances such as greetings, civilities, signs and posters, notices on packages is required by the initial levels of foreign language acquisition, in particular, levels A1 and A2 of language proficiency proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Differents authors, 2000).

Pragmatemes are also indispensable when you travel to another country and need to know what exact expression to use in a given situation. Thus, a non-native speaker risks making mistakes when formulating a correct answer to the French *Merçi*. This is due to the existence of at least fourteen possibilities to answer according to the situation, relations between speakers, degree of politeness and etc.

4. 1 Works containing pragmatically bound expressions

We find useful expressions in phrasebooks and special linguistic sections in travel guides. Unfortunately, the majority of them does not give the necessary information for an adequate usage and correct comprehension of pragmatemes (Blanco, to appear). These books are not structured properly. Expressions are stored in the form of lists without any classification. Some of them do not even have a description of the main everyday situations. Linguistic data is often limited to an imitation of pronunciation. In order to make them a useful tool these issues need to be elaborated or improved by specialists in lexicography, translation or foreign language teaching.

As for a special pragmatic dictionary, the idea is not new. The Hungarian linguist Ivan Fonagy (1982) was the first to put forward this idea. He proposed to fill in the lacunas in traditional dictionaries by putting prefabricated expressions used in specific situations.

Michel Martins-Baltar developed this idea and created the first pragmatic monolingual dictionary of usual expressions bound by motives of utterance. The French dictionary DICOMOTUS (*Dictionnaire des expressions de motif usuelles*) is based on the model Motive $\Leftrightarrow$ Reaction (Martins-Baltar, 2000). We find the information about the motive, the function, the conditions of the action presented by the expression, its form and its frequency. However some information seems to be superfluous, its cumbersome dimensions make it difficult to use especially for a non specialist.

With regards to bilingual dictionaries we can note The French-Romanian communication guide by Andrei Gancz (Gancz, 2006). Unlike traditional phrasebooks the Guide does not contain thematic vocabulary, but utterances related to speech acts and has a thematic structure. Its advantage is that it can be used for foreign language learning purposes.

Unfortunately, until now there has been no dictionary which contains pragmatemes and which has a detailed description of their situation of use.

4. 2 French-Spanish-Russian pragmatemes dictionary

During the two years (2009-2011) studying on the Erasmus Mundus International NLP & HLT Masters Programme we have developed a trilingual dictionary with pragmatemes in French, Spanish and Russian. Pragmatemes in the three languages do not refer to the translation of each concept but equivalents corresponding to the same situation.

The French-Spanish-Russian Pragmatemes Dictionary is based on the text production model developed in the scope of the Meaning-Text Theory. That means from a Concept(ual) R(epresentation) [= ConceptR] of the situation the speaker builds the Sem(antic) R(epresentation) [= SemR] of his future utterance. From the SemR he makes the utterance according to the language rules (Mel'čuk, 1998).

Pragmatemes stored in the Dictionary (1000 units in total) have the same structure of articles. The microstructure contains the information about the conceptual representation (a reflection of the reality that the speaker wants to express), the extralinguistic situation in which a pragmateme occurs (the corresponding pragmatic conditions of the use), its variants and synonyms. The pragmateme equivalents are given in three languages: French, Spanish and Russian.

Due to the lack of space we will give an example of French pragmatemes presented in the Dictionary, in group 9) Food and drink and its sub-group 9.1) Food packaging (See Table 1).

Conceptual representation	Situation of communication	Pragmateme in French	Variant of pragmateme	Synonym of pragmateme
Il faut conserver le produit au frais (It is necessary to keep the product cold)	[sur un emballage] (On the package)	<i>Conserver au frais</i> (Keep in cold)	<i>Garder au frais</i> (Save in cold)	<i>A conserver à l'abri de la chaleur</i> (Keep away from heat)

Table 1: Example of French pragmatemes in the French, Spanish, Russian Pragmatemes Dictionary

In traditional dictionaries entries are arranged in the alphabetical order. This approach is good for the reception: a learner consults these dictionaries when he does not know the meaning of a word. However, when a learner wants to find an equivalent for a pragmateme with the same conceptual representation in the same situation dictionaries with a semasiological order will not suit their needs.

Our dictionary has an onomasiological classification. That means that pragmatemes are classified according to the conversational topics: from a conceptual representation to a text of pragmateme. The Dictionary is conceived for foreign languages teaching/learning and includes the main topics studied on initial and intermediate levels of language acquisition.

All expressions are divided into 14 thematic groups:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Social interaction | 8. Shopping |
| 2. House and environment | 9. Food and drink |
| 3. Holidays | 10. Places |
| 4. Entertainment | 11. Services |
| 5. Transport | 12. Correspondance |
| 6. Travelling | 13. Education |
| 7. Health and well-being | 14. Army |

The proposed model of the dictionary is focused, firstly, on the foreign language learner. We hope that this dictionary would serve not only from time to time to explain the conceptual representation of the pragmateme but also as a useful tool for learning with the aim of

providing more autonomy to learners. Furthermore we expect that the dictionary of pragmatemes would also be useful for teachers. They would find ideas for organising and structuring the expressions during classes. Finally, the aim of the dictionary is to assure the development of production, reception and interaction skills of the student.

5 Conclusion

We have presented the phenomenon of pragmatemes and several pragmatic criteria that can be useful in its formal description. We have stated that a pragmateme can be represented by a single lexical unit, a phrase or a sentence. We have shown the interest of a contrastive approach and have revealed several semantic, pragmatic and cultural differences in Russian, French and Spanish pragmatemes. We have highlighted the importance of stereotypical utterances in foreign languages to learners and tourists travelling to a country where they do not speak the language. Neither phrasebooks nor pragmatic dictionaries give exhaustive information about pragmatemes, their meaning and their situation of utterance.

We have proposed a model of the Dictionary for the teaching/ learning of pragmatemes. It contains all pragmatic information for a correct comprehension and an adequate use of pragmatemes. The macrostructure of the dictionary focuses also on the learners' needs: 14 communicational topics help a non-native speaker to find out the right expression for the given conceptual representation. Variants and synonyms of pragmatemes complete the microstructure of the dictionary.

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