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Conversation – Strategies of Understanding and Pseudo-Understanding

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✦ Кључне речи:
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У раду се разматрају различити типови дијалога у светлу филозофских идеја о говорним чиновима и интерактивном говору. На основу примера из светске књижевности на словенским језицима могу се издвојити три модела. Они представљају различите типове вербалне комуникације и језичка средства за њихову реализацију.

The theme I have chosen for this paper arose from an increasingly topical problem – the problem of (disrupted) communication.

As a philologist I will dwell upon one aspect which is connected with my professional interests – the understanding of texts and understanding *by way of* texts.

I will start with the great Bulgarian poet A. Dalchev's definition of translation: "Translation is like a window in which the reflections of the street blend with the reflections of the room." If I may make a free interpretation – translation is also conversation – conversation between author and translator and between translated text and its addressee. The success of this conversation is coded in the conditions for under-

standing. Understanding may be achieved if one participant gives sufficiently clear instructions, which can be adequately deciphered by the other participant who thus can react in a relevant way. I intentionally mention the word instructions. Here I am not going to undertake any long excursions into the field of speech. I will not elaborate on the well-known formulations from the research on microdialogues, question-answer units and the characteristics of polylogue. However, it is an indisputable fact that if the stimulus is not deciphered as a *stimulus*, i.e. also as an instruction, there will be no *response* and thus there will be no conversation.

We have to admit that the research on conversation (and in part on dialogue)



accentuates two features: to what degree the propositional content of the statement corresponds to the aims of communication and can lead to adequate communicative value for the addressee, and of the success of some communicative strategy. Here it is as if one has ignored the fact that communication is a bipartite process and emphasizes the speaker, whereas the hearer becomes the object of attention mainly when so called “flouting” occurs. Even H. P. Grice’s “conversational maxims” which result from his general principle of co-operation between the participants in the conversation, are mainly instructions to the speaker. They are the following: The maxim of quantity – *Make your contribution as informative as required for the purposes of the conversation! One should say neither too little nor too much!*

The maxim of quality – *Your contribution should be true!*

The maxim of relevance – *Your contribution should clearly relate to the purpose of the exchange!*

The maxim of manner – *Your contribution should be perspicuous!*

This is a general maxim which is substantiated through the maxims: *Avoid obscurity of the statement! Avoid ambiguity! Be brief! Be organized!*

Apart from these maxims there are other of secondary importance (with esthetic, social or moral character) for example – *Be polite!*

In connection with Grice’s maxims, Kempson (Kempson 1975) has launched the concept of *the pragmatic world of discourse (speech)* on the basis of the examined by Strosen “*presumption of knowledge*” and “*presumption of ignorance*” – the speaker’s presumptions concerning the hearer’s knowledge about the topic of conversation. In conversation, the speaker must have

simultaneously the presumption that the hearer is not already informed about what is said, as well as the presumption that the hearer knows some facts relevant to the statement. Even this maximally generalized presentation clearly displays that it is primarily the cognitive language use (the term is from J. Habermas) that is meant. In cognitive language use the content is topicalized. It permits only speech acts in which the propositional contents may take on an explicit form of the propositional statement. Such *constative* speech acts are used when we claim that the validity of the proposition is approved. Let me remind you what Austin had in mind with the contrasting of constative and non-constative speech acts: “In a constative statement we abstract ourselves from the illocutionary... aspect of the speech act and concentrate on the locutionary. When doing this we use a quite indirect notion of the correspondence of facts... This is the ideal behavior in any circumstance, for any goals and before any audience etc... In a performative statement we concentrate on the illocutionary force of the contribution and abstract ourselves from the correspondence of facts.” (Austin 1975: 14–15) In *What is Universal Pragmatics* J. Habermas (Habermas 1984) discusses the overcoming of contradiction between the constative character of an utterance and the perlocutionary effect that it may have (as a performative statement), by differentiating interactive and cognitive language use. According to him, language communication may only take place if the participants are located simultaneously in two planes: the plane of intersubjectivity in which they have personal interrelations, and the plane of experience and the state of things. Interactive language use emphasizes the relations the speaker and hearer establish and the propositional content of

the statement is hardly mentioned. In this sense we may say that the stimulus, regardless of which type of speech act it belongs to as an independent utterance, and as part of a dialogue, also contains a directive component that is ascribed by the situation itself. This directive component represents the instruction: "Respond!", i.e. "Continue the conversation!".

An extreme example of this type of behaviour is demonstrated in the conversation between Hadji Smion and his neighbour Nencho Oreshkov – "Tschichovtsi" by Ivan Vazov (Vazov 1976). This conversation also displays the strategy of total understanding, i.e. agreement at any cost, which could be called "The Hadji Smion Strategy". It was formulated by Vazov in the following way: "...he avoided objections: nor did he make any, nor did he want any to be made to him. This rule entered his life and became a habit; his thoughts mechanically followed the thoughts of his interlocutor in all their arbitrariness..." (Vazov 1976: 31) The conversation between Hadji Smion and his neighbor Nencho Oreshkov is emblematic for this type of communication strategy:

"Хаджи, днес имаме ясно време."
 "Много ясно време, Ненчо..."
 "Май каквото гледам, идват облаци
 от Балкана, хем са дъждовни."
 "Дъждовни облаци идат, Ненчо."
 "Ще завали и ще побърка на
 харманя."
 "Ще завали, Ненчо, без друго ще
 завали, хем едър."
 "Господ знай пак, има вятър от
 запад, та ще разнесе дъжда (...)"
 "И аз това казвам, ще го разнесе,
 Ненчо."
 "Ба, дъжд няма да има (...)"
 "Нито капка, Ненчо."

It is obvious that this model, seemingly of absolute understanding, is in fact a model of pseudo-understanding. It is pseudo-understanding, because it does not conform with the most essential property of speech as an activity – to co-operation, with collaboration. In this type of conversation all answers, independently of to which type of speech act they belong, seem to function as expressive speech acts. In other words, they take on a character of etiquette and convention. The language usage here is more interactive than cognitive. Every constative stimulus is topicalized as a prompt for the continuation of the conversation and the response complies with this topicalization.

Such a speech strategy, however, is possible only under certain conditions: agreement among the participants about the "rituality" of the conversation; one participant knows that the other will not accept objections nor expect his words to have any consequences. This kind of model might arise in the "superior-subordinate" situation (of course in the worst possible variety of this archetype).

The presentation of interactive language use as cognitive is also a model of the type "understanding as pseudo-understanding". This kind of language use could be called "the Švejk model". You can imagine what trouble I had when trying to select one singular representative dialogue from the whole book. So I chose one from the beginning, which will exemplify the model. This is the conversation at the police station. Švejk enters the interrogation with the polite:

To this interactive language use Švejk replies with a "cognitive", i.e. makes a substitution – verbally and non-verbally, while formally adhering to the given instructions. To the question "What do you say?" with

which the police inspector victoriously concludes the summary of accusations against Švejk, Švejk answers literally:

“Co tomu říkáte”, vítězoslavně otázal se pán s rysy zvířecí ukrutnosti.

“Je toho hodně”, odpověděl nevinně Švejk, “všeho moc škodí”.

“Nu vidíte, že to uznáváte”.

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“Já uznávám všechno, přísnost musí být, bez přísnosti by se nikdo nikam nedostal. Jako když jsem sloužil na vojně...”

“Držte hubu!”, rozkřikl se policejní rada na Švejka, “a mluvte, až když se vás budu na něco ptát! Rozumíte?”

“Jak bych nerozuměl”, řekl Švejk, “poslušně hlásím, že rozumím a že se ve všem, co ráčejí říct, dovedu orientýrova”

(Hašek 1975: 27).

In this dialogue Švejk thinks that understanding is a motivation for co-operation. However, since the understanding is pseudo-understanding, so the co-operation is pseudo-cooperation, because the participants speak within two different fields of language usage. At first sight in this model, flouting occurs in the unsuccessful use of non-constative (performative) speech acts, mainly directives. This is so only at an isolated overview of the separate statements. In the overall conversation/dialogue, the lack of success is on a different level and is defined by the failure of the interactive and cognitive language use to coincide. I could mention many examples, but I will limit myself to three microdialogues from the following situation – at the coroner's.

“Tak vy jste tedy ten pan Švejk?”

“Já myslím”, odpověděl Švejk, “že jím musím být, poněvadž i můj tatínek byl Švejk a maminka paní Švejková. Já jim

nemohu udělat takovou hanbu, abych zapíral svoje jméno”

(Hašek 1975: 34).

To the stimulus, which presupposes a reaction like that in the expressives, i.e. it has a ritual character in this type of conversation, Švejk responds with cognitive language use and continues the model of total understanding as a result of identifying the propositional content of the interlocutor's statement as the truth:

“Vy jste ale nadrobil pěkné věci. Vy toho máte mnoho na svědomí.”

“Já mám toho vždycky na svědomí”, řekl Švejk, usmívaje se ještě laskavěji než pan soudní rada; “já mám toho, může být, ještě víc na svědomí, než ráčejí mít voni, vašnosti.”

“To je vidět podle protokolu, který jste podepsal,” ...

“Ale kdepak, vašnosti. Já sám jsem se jich optal, jestli to mám podepsat, a když řekli, abych to podepsal, tak jsem jich uposlechl. Přece se nebudu prát s nimi kvůli mému vlastnímu podpisu. Tím bych si rozhodně neposloužil. Pořádek musí být”

(Hašek 1975: 34–35).

This example could be discussed as doctor-patient communication. However, I will not dwell on this and instead consider another moment. The manners of communication in the dialogue are mixed and this leads to distortions in the pretensions of validity. Each and every speech act must in an identical way satisfy the presumption of intelligibility. When intelligibility leads to collapse in communication, the requirement for intelligibility may become the topic only through a transition to hermetic discourse (and later in connection

with its relevant language system). Here we should not overlook the circumstance that for interpersonal relations the veracity of the proposition and its relevance are most important. For communication this veracity is also important. It is exactly this circumstance that is most characteristic for the model we preliminarily called "The Švejk Model".

The statements in question form a natural engine for the development of the dialogue. On the level of speech acts they are directives and therefore incorporate the directive component that contains the stimulus. The speaker requires and expects a reaction to what he has said. This is how these law-governed manifestations transform into flouting in the Hadji Smion model.

"А що? Русия готви ли се на бой?"
 "С кого?"
 "С него."
 "С кого?"
 "С нашите де, с чалмата."
 "Неизвестно – каза подир малко
 двоумение студентът."
 "Как неизвестно? Напротив, известно."
 "На какво основание мислите това?"
 "Аз?"
 "Да."
 Хаджи Смион го изгледа опулено."
 "Но вие искате да кажете, че е
 неизвестно?"
 "Да, поне за мен е неизвестно –
 измънка студентът."
 "Речи го, че и за мене е неизвестно.
 Имаш право, руската политика е много
 тайна, а?"

(Vazov 1976: 32).

This conversation exhibits another peculiarity of communicative strategies for

understanding, namely the strategy of responsive participation. This is the placing of one of the participants in the position of a "quasi" echo-participant. We see the conscious rejection of initiative, because in the conversation and the separate micro-dialogues not only do the reciprocal participants take on the roles of speaker and listener, but also alternate in taking the initiative in leading the conversation and also in achieving both co-operation and partici-

pation. The expectations are that in such a strategy interrogatives will dominate and be expressed with the pragmatic particles "nali" and "a" which presuppose agreement or a positive reaction, i.e. preconditioned co-operation. However, when the precondition is not communicatively valid, we encounter a model contrary to those we have analyzed so far. In this model on the surface we have no understanding or pseudo-understanding, whereas in fact the interlocutors correctly decode the intensions of the other, but try to react as if this is not so.

I am tempted to call this model for "The Bay Ganyo Model" – Aleko Konstantinov "Bay Ganyo" (Konstantinov 1970), but that would not be completely correct, since it is more so a model resulting from the language behaviour type Bay Ganyo. Let me remind you of one of the first stories:

"О-о-о! Добър ден! – и една потна
 ръка сграбчи десницата ми."

"Извинете, господине – казвам му аз
 със смирено учудване, – аз нямам удо-
 волствието да ви познавам."

"Какво? Не ме познавате ли, кайш? Ти
нали си българин?"

"Българин съм."

"Е?"

"Е?"

“Е хайде, ставай да се разхождаме. Какво ще киснеш тука? Мен ме казват Ганю. Ставай!”

Нямаше нужда да ми казва, че е Ганю.

“Извинете, г-н Ганю, аз не съм свободен сега.”

“Ами че какво стоиш в кафенето, като не си свободен?”

“Ставай да ме водиш на баня. Де е тук банята?”

(Konstantinov 1970: 14).

A “You are Bulgarian, aren't you?” is grounds enough to ward off any further attempts at behaving differently from what the speaker expects.

A well-known example is from *Bay Ganyo at Jireček's* I would like to emphasize the fact that the author A. Konstantinov who in the remaining stories lets Bay Ganyo present himself through his speech behavior, in this chapter it is as if the writer cannot resist the temptation of “revealing” Bay Ganyo's intentions. In the very beginning we read: “...ще иде Бай Ганю у него: “Добър ден” – “Дал ти бог добро” – и може да го покани в къщата си...” (Konstantinov 1970: 40) That is, the expectations of the speaker, that the establishment of contact through expressives – through the usual conventional phrases of etiquette – is reason enough to expect an invitation to visit as a perlocutionary effect. Once again we detect the presence of a directive component in the stimulus in this conversation. Thus, on a speech act level, the basic postulates from the language level are confirmed – e.g. the early consolidation of the imperative as a mood in Bulgarian language. Here is another example. The initial aggressive strategy, as in the conversation with the student, is once again present.

“О-о! Добър ден, бай Иречек, как си, добре ли си? – извиква бай Ганю с един най-приятелски тон, щом влиза в кабинета на стопанина.”

Again Bay Ganyo parries Jireček's astonishment with the pretensions of community.

“Вий нали бяхте министър в София?”

“Да.”

“Е, и аз съм от там! – заключава тържествено бай Ганю.”

(Konstantinov 1970: 41).

Following this introduction to the conversation that precedes the actual aim, A. Konstantinov prefers to explicate the intentions himself: “Разговорът продължава няколко минути в този тон, сетне минава на по-практическа почва: бай Ганю хвали квартирата на стопанина, загатва му доста осезателно, че “най-сетне, има място и още един странен човек даже да се прибере тука”. “Иречек се старае да му внуши, че квартирата е тясна за домашните му. Бай Ганю си прави оглушки и развива темата за българското гостоприемство” (Konstantinov 1970: 42).

The two participants' intentions are clear to each other. Both of them have their own ideas of the maxim of politeness. One with an inherent to his behavior politeness, and the other with the pretence of politeness, which is a component for the success of the strategy. The background knowledge about the communicative situation and the interlocutor presumes that politeness might be a component for the strategy's success. “Утре, ако щеши, води ме по всички фабрики, аз съм съгласен; ще ми превеждаш, че не знам езика, а?”; Па ако обичате, съгласен

съм и у вас да остана, докато съм в Прага. А?" (Konstantinov 1970: 42). The use of the conventional formulae of politeness is here also a kind of "insurance" in case of rejection (which the speaker already expects in the outset of the conversation). These formulae also provide a possibility to make a new move. "Ако щете, санким, няма да те пресилвам", "Казвам, санким, ако обичате – обяснява сплетено бай Ганьо" (Konstantinov 1970: 42).

Let me remind you that in the sphere of speech act directives, the indirect speech acts are the most numerous. Labeling a number of utterances which are not imperatives, as directive utterances – for example interrogatives, is a result of the natural desire to find the most appropriate strategy for the success of the directive act, i.e. not only to achieve one's illocutionary aims – the hearer to identify the statement as a directive, but also to achieve the corresponding perlocutionary effect, that the listener will respond with the desired action. The diverse indirect speech acts reflect different strategies where the speaker chooses language expressions to make the hearer believe that what the speaker wants him to do is the hearer's own decision, his own will. Thus in our example Bay Ganyo accompanies his desire with the declaration "I agree", as if replying to an offer. In both cases the final passages contain the interrogative "A?" in the meaning "nali", i.e. a prompt for the response "Da", a reaction of agreement. The whole chain of strategic moves has been shortened due to fear that it might prove to be unsuccessful. The action is "va banque" with the attempt at facing the interlocutor with an accomplished fact and to imply what he is expected to say.

It seems to be a combination of the strategies we have mentioned so far that we find in Švejk in the conversation between

the secret agent Bretschneider and the innkeeper Palivec.

[...] *Hostinský Palivec myl tácky a Breamrně snažil navázat s ním vážný rozhovor. ... "To máme pěkné léto", navazoval Bretschneider svůj vážný rozhovor.*

"Stojí to všechno za hovno", odpověděl Palivec, ukládaje tácky do skleníku.

"Ty nám to pěkně v tom Sarajevu vyvedli", se slabou nadějí ozval se Bretschneider.

"V jakým Sarajevu?", otázal se Palivec, "v tek nuselskej vinárně? Tam se perou každé den, to vědí, Nusle."

"V bosenském Sarajevu, pane hostinský. Zastřelili tam pana arcivévodu Ferdinanda. Co tomu říkáte?"

"*Já se do takových věcí nepletu, s tím at mně každé políbí prdel*", odpověděl slušně pan Palivec [...]

(Hašek 1975: 10).

After the innkeeper explicitly and unambiguously has announced his reluctance to be drawn into a conversation about a dangerous political topic, the secret agent makes another attempt.

[...] "V tom Sarajevu muselo to být asi ošklivý, pane hostinský".

Na tuto záludně přímou otázku odpověděl pan Palivec neobyčejně opatrně:

"*V tuhle dobu bývá v Bosně a Hercegovině strašný horko. Když jsem tam sloužil, tak museli dávat našemu obrlajtnantovi led na hlavu*" [...]

(Hašek 1975: 12).

As a conclusion we can say that all inherent requirements for speech acts may be satisfied on two levels: directly in the context of the statement – whether resorting to experience, relying on the relevant normative conventions, or indirectly – in discourses or

in the aftermath of the consistent actions. The requirement for justification, which we assume with regulatory non-constative speech, acts, relate directly to the pretension that the speech activity fits in one normative field and in a practical discussion the validity of the norm itself is tested.

The speaker and the hearer may incite each other to recognizing the pretensions of validity

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- through the pretension of truth – the requirement for motivation

- through the pretension of correctness – the requirement for justification
- through the pretension of veracity – the requirement for reliability

Thus we return to the theoretical basis of the reasoning. In the end I would like to revert also to the image I used in the beginning of the lecture. I hope that in its window the reflections of my intentions and your expectations were successfully blended into an image of understanding and co-operation.

резюме

Σ Диалогическая речь: стратегии понимания и псевдопонимания

В статье рассматриваются стратегии в диалоге в свете философских идей о речевых актах и интерактивном говорении. На основе образцов мировой литературы на славянских языках обособляются три модели. Они представляют различные стратегии вербального общения и языковые средства их реализации.

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