

What is said and what is implicated: A study with reference to communication in English and Russian

Anna Sysoeva

Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge, UK

Abstract

The study of cross-cultural differences in the degree of reliance on different types of inferences shows that pragmatic inference contributing to the additional implicated proposition is the only kind of inference that can be preferred or dispreferred for cultural reasons. Defaults and pragmatic inferences contributing to the truth-conditional representation, on the other hand, are not a matter of preference/dispreference. This observation signifies that different types of inferences differ in their functions and processing.

Introduction

Since the difference between *the said* and *the implicated* was revealed, there has been a lot of debate as to what categories should be distinguished in the domain between what is said and what is implicated (Carston 2002, Grice 1989, Levinson 2000, Recanati 2004). I suggest that studying cross-cultural differences and similarities in the degree of reliance on the sources of information leading to the expression of the overall meaning can shed light on (i) the functions different types of inferences have, (ii) the degree of universality in the reliance on different types of inferences and (iii) the necessity of distinguishing between different types of inferences.

Theoretical framework and terminological remarks

Russian and English languages allow performing most types of speech acts through both what is said and implicature. The difference lies in the degree to which people of different cultures are willing to communicate by inviting the hearer to infer certain information in order to get to the overall meaning of the utterance. I will use the notion of *preference* to denote this willingness.

Cross-cultural differences in the degree of reliance on the sources of information contributing to the meaning of an act of communication are studied in the framework of Default Semantics (Jaszczolt 2005). Jaszczolt (2005) identifies the following sources: combination of word meaning and sentence

structure; defaults; conscious pragmatic inference₁ (CPI1) and conscious pragmatic inference₂ (CPI2). The first three sources contribute to the truth-conditional representation of an act of communication. CPI2 lies outside this representation. My aim is to investigate which of the sources are preferred with varying degrees in different cultures. The results are illustrated by a study of 300 randomly selected American, British and Russian online job advertisements.

Cross-cultural differences in the degree of reliance on different types of inferences

Conscious pragmatic inferences₂

In 84 out of 100 Russian online job advertisements no essential part of information is left to CPI2. By contrast, only 8 out of 100 British and 17 out of 100 American advertisements do not require CPI2 of the reader. This considerable difference in the preference for CPI2 is explained by a difference in cultural values. Russians report that implicating is a hindrance on truthful and sincere relations between people, which is one of the most important traditional values in Russian culture (Wierzbicka 1992, Zaliznjak et. al. 2005). In British and American cultures, on the other hand, implicating is perceived as a sign of politeness.

Because of the difference in cultural values, CPI2s differ in the social functions they perform in different cultures. In Russian CPI2s are used out of necessity rather than out of preference: to disguise illegal content, as in (1), or to avoid direct comparison with competitors working illegally, as in (2).

(1) Trebuetsja massazhist (možno bez opyta raboty – obučenie predostvljaetsja) – devuška, možno inogorodnjaja, prijatnoj vnešnosti, bez kompleksov, s razumnymi ambicijami, gotovaja zarabatyvat’.

“A masseur is needed (work experience not required – training provided) – a girl, may be Moscow non-resident, good-looking, without complexes, with reasonable ambitions, ready to earn.”

+> A prostitute is required.

(2) Oformlenie po trudovoj knižke, sobljudenie KZOT.

“Registering in the work book, following the labour code.”

+> Unlike many Russian companies, we work legally.

In British and American advertisements communicating meaning by inviting CPI2 contributes to persuasiveness by emphasising politeness and attention to the needs of a particular reader. For example, (3) is a milder way of communicating requirements than the bald on record form ‘The candidate must...’ that is preferred in Russian. In (4) personal reader addressing through the use of personal pronouns, imperatives, questions and elements of

spoken language implicitly communicates that the writer cares about the reader's individual interests.

(3) We would be happy to receive applications from candidates who can offer expertise and experience in at least four of the following areas...

+> Candidates must have expertise and experience in at least four of the following areas...

(4) Italy, Singapore, Australia, Hong Kong, Hawaii, Philippines – where would you most like to show off your creative talents?

+> We offer you a choice of location depending on your individual preferences.

Pragmatic inferences₁

In Default Semantics pragmatic inference contributing to truth conditions may be either developments of the logical form, as in (5), or completely different propositions. For example, the truth-conditional representation for (6a) may be (6c) rather than (6b)

(5) If you do not change [for the better] something in your life now [in the nearest future], you will always [during your lifetime] have things you already have.

(6a) You are not going to die.

(6b) You are not going to die from this wound.

(6c) You should not worry.

The degree of reliance on CPIs of both types does not seem to differ cross-culturally. The reason is that in case of CPI1 the speaker is not perceived as saying one thing and implying something different. Therefore, there is no dispreference for CPI1 in Russian culture.

Defaults

Though the content of defaults stemming from cultural stereotypes is different cross-culturally, there is no cross-cultural difference in the preference for communicating meaning by inviting default inference from the hearer. The reason seems to be that speakers are not aware of performing default inferences. The universal reliance on defaults is explained by the natural tendency of human beings to search for the most economical ways of expressing thought (Levinson 2000).

Conclusions

The study has shown that there is a different degree of universality in the reliance on different types of inferences in communication. Cultures are different in the preference for CPI2s and similar in the preference for defaults

and CPI1s. People choose to invite CPI2s not because it is more effective for cognitive reasons, but because it is more effective for social reasons. This is corroborated by the fact that CPI2s perform different social functions in cultures with different values. Defaults and CPI1s, on the other hand, are required by cognitive factors.

Difference in the psychological preference for inviting CPI1s, CPI2s and defaults from the hearer shows that there is a difference in the process of arriving at these types of inferences. Conscious pragmatic choice is present in case of CPI2. Defaults and CPI1s, on the other hand, seem to be arrived at by some facilitated inference of which the hearer is unaware. Experimental evidence is needed to be able to judge if it is a low-cost spontaneous conscious inference or an unconscious inference. Differences in the process of arriving at CPI1s and CPI2s show that it is justified to distinguish between these types of inferences from the point of view of processing as well as from the point of view of a theory. It should be recognised that functionally independent propositions may act as primary meanings.

All the components that contribute to the truth-conditional representation in Default Semantics are similar in the sense that a person cannot prefer or disprefer to make use of these sources. The conscious choice takes place between the merger proposition and the post-merger layer.

References

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