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Lexical pragmatics in seven theses¹

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1. Introduction

The present paper aims to investigate the mechanisms by which word meanings stored in the lexicon are modified when they are used in utterances. These mechanisms belong to the realm of lexical pragmatics. There are several conceptions of lexical pragmatics. While some of them: Horn (2008), Huang (2009), Levinson (2000) are neo-Gricean, Blutner (2010) is based on optimality-theory pragmatics, which is also neo-Gricean in the sense that two countervailing principles, namely the Q-principle and R-principle, are assumed. And the third major approach is relevance-theoretic lexical pragmatics (Wilson and Carston 2007). My primary concern in the present paper lies in examining the types of information included in word meanings and their role with respect to developing the logical form underlying an utterance into an explicit meaning of a proposition. Therefore, the further discussion of issues relevant for making up a lexical pragmatics conception is slightly more biased toward the relevance-theoretic one than the neo-Gricean ones. Nevertheless, I also admit that it is at variance with some relevance-theoretic assumptions, at least with some of the standards with respect to word meanings and interpretation mechanisms. In what follows I propose my approach to how lexically stored word meanings contribute to the explicit propositional content of utterances and how they get their actual interpretations in the construal of utterance meanings.

2. Theses to be maintained by lexical pragmatics

To begin with, let us take as a starting point **the contextualist stance**, according to which the explicit content of an utterance is underspecified by the linguistically encoded meaning and a substantial element of pragmatic inference is crucial for determining not only what is implicated but also what is said (cf. Recanati 2012). Moreover, as Sperber and Wilson (2012) state, a **concept** which a word is used to convey in an utterance has to be **contextually worked out**. All words behave this way independently of whether or not a word encodes a full concept. The latter case when **words do not encode full-fledged concepts** has not been subjected to a thorough examination yet. However, it would deserve special attention because underspecificity coming from the lexicon raises the following two questions: first, how to treat a word meaning as a not full-fledged concept and, second, how such a concept becomes a contextually full one depending on various types of underspecificity. Sperber and Wilson's (2012) examples include words *my*, *have*, *near* and *long* but one can think that this category of words is very common and one can list a great number of words which do not encode full-

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fledged concepts taking into account such views on word meanings in utterances as Two-level Conceptual Semantics (cf. Lang and Maienborn 2011) and Generative Lexicon Theory (Pustejovsky 1995). Before showing my analyses of words of the given kind, I have to present my answer to the question how to treat a word meaning as a not full-fledged concept.

2.1. Types of information encoded in word meanings

Now it is clear that even if one ignores polysemy, homonymy and synonymy as well as procedural meanings, **the equivalence between concepts and word meanings** is not to be held. On the one hand, there are a great many concepts which are not encoded by any lexical item, and, on the other, there are words which do not encode full concepts. But what constitutes the meaning of a word in the latter case if one maintains – as in Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Carston 2002: 322 – that concepts are atomic? Relying on arguments in Groefsema (2007) and in my previous work (Bibok 2004), I reject the atomistic view of concepts and, consequently, that of conceptual meanings of words. Instead, I favor the **Common-Stock-of-Features Framework**, the core idea of which is that “both conceptual knowledge and lexical-semantic knowledge involve a common stock of **featural** atomic representations but combine them into complex structures in a different way” (Kelter and Kaup 2012: 2796; emphasis added – K.B.). What features does then a word encode in its meaning?

Detached from their contexts, some pieces of contextual information can become context-independent. Furthermore, such a kind of encyclopedic information and information concerning the use of language can be encoded as an integral part of lexical-semantic representations (Németh T. and Bibok 2010). Therefore, like Groefsema (2007), who recasts logical and encyclopedic pieces of information as ingredients of the content of a concept, I also assume **two types of information in word meanings**. Besides meaning representations composed by means of **primitive predicates**, lexical pragmatics (Bibok 2004, 2010) applies encyclopedic meaning descriptions. In doing so, a significant role is given to **prototype semantics and lexical stereotypes**.

Since prototype semantics is widely used in one or another format, here I want to emphasize only one thing. Degree of membership is only a prototypical feature of prototypes because prototypicality effects also occur when clear category boundaries are present (something is or is not a bird but some birds may be “birdier” than others) or even when a category (e.g., *odd number*) has a clear definition (Geeraerts 1989, Kelter and Kaup 2012).

Lexical stereotypes prescribe the corresponding – perhaps culture-dependent – manner and goal of the events to be expressed by single lexemes and not periphrastic (causative) constructions (Gergely and Bever 1986). Although being encyclopedic, lexical stereotypes differ from prototypes, because there may be prototypical causative events not expressible by single lexical items. Moreover, the information encoded by lexical stereotypes does not have to be treated as conversational implicatures (McCawley 1978) if one makes arguments along Groefsema (2007).

Thus, the present paper does not only take for granted that both semantic predicates and encyclopedic knowledge are indispensable parts of lexical-semantic representations but also that there should be a division of labor between them. I assume a distinction between **necessary constituents and prototypical, stereotypical encyclopedic knowledge** in word meanings.

2.2. Types of encoded encyclopedic information

Now we can turn to some examples whose lexical-semantic analysis illustrates not only the distinction just mentioned but also various types of the storage of encyclopedic information in representations of word meanings.

2.2.1. Prototypes and lexical stereotypes added to the predicate decomposition

The analytic description in (1a) shows the meaning core of the Russian verb *rezat'* 'cut through pressing' and then in (1b) it is translated into a formalized metalanguage of semantic predicates:

- (1) (a) 'using Z such that Z presses Y, X causes Y to become not whole';
(b) [[[x USE z] : [z PRESS y]] CAUSE [BECOME [not WHOLE y]]]

However, imagine the following situation: John puts the edge of a knife on the bread and then a heavy stone on the knife causing the distortion of bread, i.e. causing the bread to become not whole. This event could hardly be designated by means of the single lexeme *rezat'* as in (2).

- (2) Džon režet xleb nožom.
John.NOM cuts bread.ACC knife.INS
'John is cutting bread with a knife.'

Instead, the above-mentioned event would be expressed with a periphrastic construction: *Doing this and this, he causes another event...*

Even though someone uses instruments with a sharp edge in standard ways, typical and non-typical situations of *rezat'* can appear. For instance, cutting bread into two or several pieces with a knife seems to be more typical than cutting it such a way that it is distorted but is not divided into separate pieces. Even less typical is an event when we try to cut a board into pieces with a knife. In addition, it is not untypical for the verb *rezat'* to denote cutting events carried out with another kind of sharp-edged instruments, namely with scissors. Consider (3):

- (3) Džon režet list bumagi nožnicami.
John.NOM cuts sheet.ACC paper.GEN scissors.INS
'John is cutting a list of paper with scissors.'

Consequently, we need to supplement the core meaning in (1) with the indication of the lexical stereotype in (4), containing encyclopedic information, perhaps, not propositional, but procedural in its nature:

- (4) 'standard ways of using Z, with which X can cut Y through pressing'.

And we also have to indicate the prototype. Consider (5):

- (5) 'using sharp-edged instruments such as a knife, a slicing machine or a pair of scissors to cause the distortion of, e.g., bread, meat or paper through pressing and dividing it into pieces'.

Now let us take further examples in (6) and (7).

- (6) Džon režet kusočki (mjasa).
John.NOM cuts pieces.ACC meat.GEN
'John is cutting pieces (of meat).'

- (7) Džon režet poloski (bumagi).

John.NOM cuts stripes.ACC paper.GEN
 ‘John is cutting stripes (of paper).’

What is cut (and expressed by syntactic objects) in (6) and (7) is not existing objects but they are coming into being through that activity. In other words, it is pieces of meat and stripes of paper that are results of the events under consideration. One can cope with such a use of the verb as follows. When cutting something does not only cause something to become not whole, some parts of it also come to exist. Therefore, instead of (1) the meaning of *rezat*’ can be given more detailed as (8):

- (8) [[[x USE z] : [z PRESS y]] CAUSE [[BECOME [not WHOLE y]] (: [BECOME [EXIST w]])]],
 where 1. *w* = parts of *y*, i.e. [w PARTS_OF y],
 2. the round brackets express optionality.

Finally, one should realize that prototypicality conditions, and also possible deviations from those, play a crucial role in identification of denotation of the verb *rezat*’ ‘cut through pressing’. Such a character of denotation of this verb should be strongly emphasized as a novelty in comparison with previous analyses (for details, see Bibok 2009: 11–15).

2.2.2. Prototypes built into the predicate decomposition

Such prototypes account, e.g., for the appearance of directional phrases originally not taken by verbs of cutting. Consider (9) and (10).

- (9) Prodavščica narezala kolbasu tonkimi
 salesgirl.NOM PRF.cut.PST.SG.FEM salami.ACC thin
 kuskami na voščenuju bumagu.
 pieces.INS on wax paper.ACC
 ‘The salesgirl sliced the salami into thin pieces onto the wax paper.’

- (10) Mama naterla syr na gotovye
 mother.NOM PRF.grated.SG.FEM cheese.ACC on prepared
 makarony.
 macaroni.PL.ACC
 ‘The mother grated the cheese onto the prepared macaroni.’

How can adverbial directional phrases appear with these Russian cutting verbs, not having them before? To get an answer, let us develop the lexical-semantic representation of *rezat*’ a bit further and take into consideration the following: parts coming into being by cutting **typically** – as world knowledge dictates – move and occupy a spatial position. Instead of adding this piece of typical, encyclopedic information to the core meaning representation as a separate prototype description, it should be built into it as its optional part in round brackets. Now one gets a modified representation in (11):

- (11) [[[x USE z] : [z PRESS y]] CAUSE [[[BECOME [not WHOLE y]] (:[[BECOME [EXIST w]] (: [w MOVE_TO v]])]]]],
 where 1. *w* = parts of *y*, i.e. [w PARTS_OF y],
 2. the round brackets express optionality.

There are two remarks concerning (11). First, since the component of motion in round brackets figures in a wider scope of other round brackets, the former can play a role together with the latter. Thus, (11) allows appearance of the motion sense only in the case when cutting results in not only becoming not whole but also being divided into parts, which is in full accordance with our every-day knowledge. Second, the fact that the relational formula in (11) encodes some encyclopedic information clearly shows grammatical relevance of the latter with respect to the presence of directional phrases in a construction.

3. Prototypes as a main constituent of lexical-semantic representations (LSRs)

The **third** type of encoded encyclopedic information is prototypical characteristics which, besides some general classifying features, constitute the main part of LSRs. Consider natural kind terms, e.g. *tiger*. Besides being ANIMAL, a tiger – prototypically – is a fierce big feline with yellow fur and black stripes and, perhaps, lives in a jungle. Although nouns of artifacts have a somewhat more relational meaning because of the GOAL component, their shape, material and correspondence between GOAL and actual usability or use are subject to prototype semantics. It is worth noting that possible lack of coincidence between GOAL and actual usability or use indicates the need of a more precise formulation of the former. What is sure is that an artifact is made in accordance with a function. However, whether that function is always realized when the artifact is used or whether that function can be fulfilled at all are issues different from what goal the artifact has been made in accordance with. For instance, in the case of *boat* one can assume (12):

- (12) [x MADE_IN_ACCORDANCE_WITH_GOAL y],
where y = MOVING_ACROSS_WATER.

2.3. Construction of utterance meanings

Underspecified word meaning representations encoding both necessary predicates and prototypical or stereotypical structures of context-independent pragmatic knowledge are **semantically and pragmatically rich enough to serve as a basis for full-fledged, actual (non-metaphorical) pragmatic senses** emerging contextually in utterances. For lack of time this can be illustrated here only by one brief case study.

Again, let us take the Russian verb *rezat'* 'cut through pressing'. (13) and (14) are in accordance with the prototype.

- (13) rezat' xleb
cut bread.ACC
'cut bread'

- (14) rezat' xleb nožom
cut bread.ACC knife.INS
'cut bread with a knife'

However, if there is a deviation from it, one has to extend the context to get a relevant interpretation. Cf. (15).

- (15) rezat' dosku nožom
cut board.ACC knife.INS
'cut a board with a knife'

The object to be cut with a knife in (15), i.e. a board, does not fit the prototype of the verb *rezat'*. But we can have access to respective – not encoded – encyclopedic information as a kind of extended context (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1995) since on the basis of our general world knowledge we all know that it is possible to use a knife to cut a board (through pressing) if it is necessary. Despite non-prototypicality of such a kind of cutting, this information is in accordance with the prototype of the verb because the event at stake is fairly similar to prototypical ones. Therefore, one can reach a suitable interpretation: ‘causing a board to become not whole with a knife (through pressing)’, although this causation needs strenuous efforts and a long time. In other words, the meaning construction of the expression in (15) is done through pragmatic inference on the basis of **encyclopedic information not associated with any lexical items** occurring in the context of *rezat'* but comes from our general world knowledge.

The interpretation mechanism proposed for (15) is valid for another deviation from the prototype. Consider (16).

- (16) *rezat'* xleb toporom
 cut bread.ACC ax.INS
 ‘cut bread with an ax’

The instrument indicated in (16) does not match the prototype of the verb *rezat'*. But once again on the basis of our general world knowledge, we have a further piece of encyclopedic information that it is possible to use an ax as a knife if it is necessary, purposeful or simply if one wants to. This piece of information makes (16) similar enough to the prototype of the verb, and one can get a relevant interpretation in an encyclopedically extended context: ‘cut bread with an ax (through pressing)’.

Furthermore, there are uses of *rezat'* which are quite obviously even more different from typical cases than (15) and (16).

- (17) *rezat'* mjaso kameškom
 cut meat.ACC shingle.INS
 ‘cut meat with a shingle’

- (18) *rezat'* rogovicu lazernym lučom
 cut cornea.ACC laser beam.INS
 ‘cut the cornea with laser’

As to (17), it can be interpreted with the help of our general world knowledge as follows. Although in spite of a requirement of the prototype a shingle is not an instrument, a flat one probably has a sharp edge and it may occasionally be used to cut meat in a way we cut with a knife (which might not have been an atypical case in prehistoric age).

In (18), the object to cut with does not have any sharp edge at all. Nonetheless, cutting can take place because according to our general knowledge about world, the result of the causation of distortion comes into being in a way similar to non-prototypical and prototypical cases of using sharp-edged instruments or objects.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the differentiation of the given verb within the scope of the prototype in an immediate context as in (13) is only the typical case for lack of any specific context. If we gain from an extended context, e.g. from physically observable environment, information about using a non-typical instrument, say an ax, to cut bread (through pressing), then **the typical interpretation available in an immediate context** does

not emerge. Instead, we interpret (13) **in an extended context** under consideration as (16), i.e. ‘cut bread with an ax (through pressing)’.

3. Conclusion

On the basis of the above analyses as well as my previous work (Bibok 2010, Németh T. and Bibok 2010), the following seven theses may be formulated for lexical pragmatics.

First, besides lexical stereotypes, at least **three types of encoded encyclopedic information** can be distinguished: prototypical characteristics which are added to or built into the predicate decomposition and third, prototypes which constitute the main part of LSRs.

Second, since a number of words do not encode full-fledged concepts lexical pragmatics cannot do without **underspecified meaning representations**. Out of their different forms, in section 2.2 we have encountered **prototypes and the bracketing of the optional (prototypical) parts**.

Third, having underspecified meaning representations, words reach their full meanings **in corresponding contexts** through considerable pragmatic inference. Inspired by Relevance Theory (cf. Sperber and Wilson 1995), my version of lexical pragmatics distinguishes between **immediate and extended contexts**. However, they are meant here as contexts inside and outside utterances, respectively, in which words under interpretation occur.

Fourth, besides the three types of lexically encoded encyclopedic knowledge, **not encoded** pieces of such information have been established in connection with encyclopedically extended contexts.

Fifth, the Cognitive Principle of **Relevance** (Sperber and Wilson 1995) regulates the various ways of construction of utterance meanings, **the hierarchy** of which is also influenced by the same principle. Interpretation proceeds from less to more processing effort, i.e. from taking into consideration lexical-semantic representations to extending contexts. However, an interpretation can only be **typical (or default)** and another one emerges if any specific information is present from the start.

Sixth, lexical pragmatics treats **constructionally emerging senses** in (9) and (10) as a special subcase of contextual interpretation where a word changes its argument structure (for my lexical-constructional approach to syntactic alternations, see Bibok 2010).

Seventh, I locate lexical pragmatics within a broader conception of interaction of grammar and pragmatics in which grammar and pragmatics are defined as two separate but highly interacting components of the theory of language modeling grammatical and pragmatic competence (for this broader conception, see Németh T. and Bibok 2010).

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