

PRAGMALINGUISTIC PARAMETERS OF A PROFESSIONAL OATH AS A PERFORMATIVE SPEECH GENRE

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the authors' view on pragmatic and linguistic parameters of the oath as a performative speech genre. Viewed as a communicative act the oath is analyzed as a whole made of the four components: con-situation, semantic context, presupposition and speech. The comparative analysis of Russian and English texts of oaths revealed similarity of the composition of an oath as a non-fiction text comprising three parts. The analysis pursued demonstrated similarity of the spectrum of the functions fulfilled by the oaths: performative, inspirational, declarative, integrative, intensifying.

Keywords: *oath, performative speech act, pragmatic and linguistic phenomenon, communicative act, con-situation.*

INTRODUCTION

Unprecedentedly long existence of vows and oaths confirms their significance in society. Texts of oaths change and differ in times and countries, but the phenomenon itself is universal: there is no country, or a tribe, or an ethnos which does not practice making vows or taking oaths. The main pragmatic reason for the oaths to be non-perishable is probably because they imply a greater than usual care in the act of the performance of one's duty.

The presented study is aimed at defining and comparing pragmalinguistic parameters of Russian and English professional oaths taken while changing an occupational (social) status, i.e. taking office, entering the law, joining the army, going to the bar, taking the chair, etc.

The data used in the study presented are texts of 23 oaths: 1. Russian: Hippocratic Oath, 1936; Oath of Teachers, 2005; Oath of Teachers, 2006; Oath of Pioneers of the Soviet Union, 1986; Military Oath, 1993; Oath of the President of the Russian Federation, 1993; Oath of Attorney, 2002; Oath of Doctors of the Soviet Union, 1971; Oath of Doctors of the Russian Federation, 1994; Oath of Doctors of the Russian Federation, 1999; Communist Oath 1919; Hippocratic Oath, 1924; 2. English: Hippocratic Oath, 1943; Hippocratic Oath, 1950; The PSU Teacher's Oath, 2010; Teacher's Oath, 2000; Scout Oath, 1908; Olympic Oath (sportsman), 2000; Olympic Oath (judge), 2000; The Enlistment Oath, 1962; The Oath of Office of the President of the USA, in 1787; The Lawyer's Oath, 1986; The Military Oath, 1959.

The analytical framework applied in the study is based on three theories: the theory of speech acts of J. R. Searle [1980] and M. Bakhtin [1979] developed by and V. Dementiev [1997, 2000], the theory of semantic fields by J. Trier [1931, 1934] and the theory of componential analysis of meaning developed in the works of E. Nida [1975] and F.R. Palmer [1983].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of oath as a text and speech act (or genre) has a very wide bibliography worldwide, obviously due to its complexity as a pragmalinguistic phenomenon. Another factor to the popularity of oath as a linguistic topic is its cultural implications, because the text of an oath always retains some kind of markedness: either national (cf. oaths of judges of the Russian Federation and Judicial or Official Oaths of judges of the United Kingdom), or ethnic (cf. sailors' oaths of Slavs and Greeks), historical (cf. the versions of the Hippocratic oath of the third century BC and modern times), etc.

The social functions of oath as a performative act has been changing throughout the centuries. In the feudal system lacking a proper institution of law, the oath as a verbal commitment ('word is bond') played a very important role and performed a wide range of functions sustaining the state, the institution of family, all types of social relations, as well as professional ethics [Canfield 1989].

John Searle views the oath as 'a commissive/constative hybrid', i.e. as a statement (constative) and a declaration of certain obligations (commissive) [Searle, 1980]. And since the oath obliges the speaker to perform a series of actions (In a certain quality (As a physician, a member of the organization, the husband ...), I promise to do X, Y, Z), it plays the role of an identifying marker and a regulator for future action. The spectrum of liabilities, i.e. obligatory actions, is presented in the text of the oath: to serve, perform, love, carry out, fulfill, officiate, execute, etc. The text of the oath also marks the person uttering the oath in some particular capacity: "getting the high rank of a doctor and starting professional activities ...", "I, (name), deliberately, unselfishly and without coercion, joining the Party of Communists-Bolsheviks", "I, (name, last name), do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States", "I, (name and surname), having been appointed an officer in the (Service) of the United States", etc.

Oaths are implemented in speech acts (I swear, this will never happen again.), as well as in the texts of the corresponding speech genre – performatives. "In cases when performative acts impart their character to a certain set of simple communicative actions, then, in our view, we can talk of a performative genre. It is in the genre, not a separate act (which, according to contemporary pragmatics, are universal and few) the cultural identity of epochs and peoples is manifested to the utmost, it reflects the nature of the language use, experience and understanding of its nature" [Karabykov 2010].

As a pragmalinguistic phenomenon the text of a professional oath implies some extra-linguistic context and is pronounced in a standardized environment relevant to the historical stage of the development of the society and professional community. The standardized environment in this case refers to a non-textual typical, accepted and recognized by the community con-situation of the utterance of the oath, i.e. presence of the addresser (s) and the addressee, some attributes, following the scenario, duration of the ceremony, trooping the Colour, using the Bible, putting hands on the chest, etc.

STUDYING THE QUESTION

Types of con-situations

The authors distinguish between (1) the con-situation of an oath as a speech act, i.e. when the oath is being taken and (2) the con-situation of an oath in a broader context. The first implies following the

accepted rituals during the time the text of an oath is pronounced, the second requires executing of what is obliged by the oath. In case of failure of the latter, the Agent becomes a perjurer and co-agents get the right to punish the Agent. The Oath-breaker is entitled to a plea for forgiveness to the third, but not the second party .

Taking the oath is preceded by a period of training: by this time the Agent is to acquire some experience and be ready to move to a new stage of his life joining a position or an organization. E.g. he was trained at the University to become (a doctor, a teacher, a judge) participated in the events in which the Agent received an approval of Co-Agents, addressees, people, society, a community, the population etc.

When viewed in a chain of stages of the event "preparing for the oath (Stage 1) → the oath (Stage 2) → following the commitment, executing the obligation (Stage 3)", the roles of participants alter. Preparing for the oath (Stage I) involves two categories of actors: (1) Agents approving willingness of a patient for the oath and (2) a Patient experiencing the actions of the Agents. During the oath (Stage II) the roles of participants are changing: the Patient of Stage 1 becomes the Agent, while the Agents of Stage I losing their active role still retain their significance as verifiers of the event, Co-Agents. The oath loses its significance if taken without verifiers, witnesses (Co-Agents). On Stage III (executing the obligation) Co-Agents become Agents again, assessing the activities of the one who took the oath (Agent of Stage II).

At Stage 2, which is the central one, Co-Agents (verifiers, witnesses) of the oath are representatives of the population or the country, government (women, men, colleagues, patients / the sick, teachers, comrades, students / pupils, participants / competitors), sharing the presupposition of the Agent about the significance and importance of what is happening. The Agents may be of two major categories: those who took the oath before (members of the party, soldiers, etc.) and those who though sharing axiological principles of the Agent have never had the experience. The Recipients of the oath may be a much wider spectrum of recipients than those present at the ceremony: all citizens of the country (swear ... my homeland [Military Oath, 1993], comrades, peers ("In the face of his comrades solemnly swear ..." [Oath of the Pioneer of the Soviet Union, 1986]); In the name of all the competitors [Olympic Oath (part 1 - sportsman), 2000]; In the name of all the judges and officials [Olympic Oath (part 2 - judge), 2000]. The Agent may address his oaths to other Co-Agents including God (to God ... I swear [Oath of Teachers, 2006]), gods (I swear by Apollo physician, Asclepius, Hygieia, and Panacea, and I all the gods and goddesses), abstract concepts such as honor and conscience (I swear to conscience [Oath of teachers, 2006]; On my honor [Scout oath, 1908])

In occupational ritual speech acts (Oath of Enlistment, execution of a written commitment, fulfilling a covenant), the oath is successful only if both the addresser (Agent) and the addressee (Co-Agent) have some special powers. It is obvious that in a real situation there are cases of (1) an asymmetrical relationship of the addresser and the addressee (president – people, liable for military service – military leaders) when the communicative situation implies the Agent (addresser) is due to occupy a higher position than co-agents and (2) a symmetrical (balanced) relationship (a pioneer / scout – mates / friends, a communist – members of the party), when the actors are peers.

In both cases, the bidirectional relationship of the addresser and the addressee is implemented based on the three aspects of a typical con-situation of an oath as a conventional act. Firstly, there is some degree of familiarity of the addresser and the addressee (it is impossible to promise and swear to strangers): the incoming doctor - doctors: the incoming president - officials, an athlete - athletes, coaches, and others ("In the face of my comrades I solemnly promise ..." [Oath of Pioneers of the Soviet Union, 1986]). Secondly, the addressee acquires some obligations to the addresser on the implementation of a specific action (s).

These commitments impose a certain amount of responsibility on the addressee: if the oath is violated, the addressee has the authority to take measures: to punish, shame, blame, publicize the act, etc. ∴ «Now if I

keep this oath and break it not, may I enjoy honour, in my life and art, among all men for all time; but if I transgress and forswear myself, may the opposite befall me» [Hippocratic Oath, 1924], «If I fulfill this oath and do not violate it, may it be granted to me to enjoy life and art, being honored with fame among all men for all time to come; if I transgress it and swear falsely, may the opposite of all this be my lot» [Hippocratic Oath, 1943]. This right is implemented due not to laws, but professional ethics. And finally, thirdly, in the case of a broken oath, the addressee loses confidence in the addresser, “Whatsoever in the course of practice I see or hear (or even outside my practice in social intercourse) that ought never be published abroad, I will not divulge, but consider such things to be holy secrets” [Hippocratic Oath, 1924], “What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself, holding such things shameful to be spoken about” [Hippocratic Oath, 1943]. Hence, the variety of functions performed by oaths is broad: identifying, performative, inspiring, declarative, integrative.

The identifying functions of the oath implements in lexical objectifications of the Agent: "I swear that while exercising the powers of the President of the Russian Federation", "I solemnly swear to honestly and conscientiously fulfill the duties of a lawyer», «I, _____, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of the President of the United States and.« ...

The texts of oaths contain performatives of two types: informative (descriptive, narrative, argumentative) and verifying (convincing, effecting). The first type, informative, are implemented in the following texts: I will apply, for the benefit of my students, all strategies known to be effective, avoiding busy-work in favor of work with real meaning to the students and their families [The PSU Teacher's oath, 2010]; I swear that, while exercising the powers of the President of the Russian Federation I will respect and protect the rights and freedoms of men and citizens, observe and protect the Constitution of the Russian Federation [Oath of the President of the Russian Federation, 1993]. The second type, verifying, is implemented in the modifiers, describing the addresser's actions: to teach without fee or contract, I observe this Oath and do not violate it [Hippocratic oath, 1950]; gladly share, great humbleness, to inspire one another to achieve excellence [The PSU Teacher's oath, 2010]. As we can see, the inspiring function is also realized in the performatives of the second type.

The inspiring function of oaths as texts used to encourage people becomes possible only due to the shared presuppositions of the addresser and addressee(s). A medical school graduate taking an oath, inspires addressees with a hope for cure and a high quality of health care services, a new judge – for justice and order in the society, President – for the prosperity of the nation. The lexical markers used are words nominating emotions and noble actions (use treatment to help the sick, protect the rights, freedoms and interests of principals, to faithfully serve the people), and praise for the addressee (to cherish their trust, to see and respect personality in every student, will serve to the glory, greatness and prosperity of my homeland - Great Russia !, for the glory of sport and the honour of our teams).

Likewise, the general presupposition of the actors induces common semantic meanings of the oath con-situation: inspiration, solemnity, formality, the significance of what is happening, the binding authority of the oath to society, etc .

The declarative function implements in the proclamation of the principles of action of the Agent (see the examples above), the declaration of the duty, occupational responsibilities and problems. The declaration of the duty implies the proclamation of moral obligations of the addresser to the addressee (abstaining from ... injustice, being far from all intentions of injustice and harm, without hiding anything, without distorting or ignoring, not stooping to hatred, blasphemy and slander; keeping myself free from all intentional wrong-doing and harm; will keep them from harm and injustice; I will abstain from harming or wronging), patriotic duty (passionately love my country; rigorously observe laws of Pioneers of the Soviet Union; courageously defend freedom, independence and constitution of Russia, the people and the

fatherland; defend the Constitution of the United States; to obey the Scout Law), civil duty (to respect and protect the rights and freedoms of men and citizens, to protect the rights, freedoms and interests of principals; to help other people at all times). Linguistic markers for declaration of one's occupational duties are words of the corresponding semantic domain: art (to hold him who has taught me this art as equal to my parents, in purity and in holiness I will guard my art), treatment (I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment), work (use in their work the knowledge and experience of science teaching, avoiding busy-work in favor of work with real meaning to the students and their families), power (I will use my power to help the sick to the best of my ability and judgment), obligations (I impose upon myself this voluntary obligations).

However, taking the oath the addresser does not only declare his intentions, but exhibits his attitude relating his future actions in a new way: e.g. dearly love their country, to comply strictly with the requirements of military regulations.

The integrative function is implemented not only with the explicit lexical markers, the so called "signs of integration" (comrades, people, citizens of my country, my fellow citizens, to do my duty to God and my country; preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States, and others.), but with pragmatic markers: solemnity, attention, focus on the agent and others. The complete integration involves a high level of pragmalinguistic presuppositions of the addresser and the addressee: the same or similar opinions and views on the appropriateness / acceptability of words, behavior, appearance, attributes, maintenance, etc.

CONCLUSION

Thus, in a professional discourse, the oath as a performative speech genre is implemented in a number of pledging texts, the so called 'promissives', which while publicly uttered change the professional (social) status of a person. Pragmalinguistic similarity of the studied Russian and English professional (public) oaths is provided by (1) the presence of the agent/ sender/addresser (the person who enters the office, joins an organization) and the recipient, addressee (representatives of people, authorities), by a third party in control of the undertaking (God, power, etc.); (2) the spectrum of their functions (performative, inspirational, declarative, integrative, intensifying).

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