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## **A Taxonomy of Cross-cultural Differences in Slavic Languages**

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### 1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is twofold:

- a) to present interim results of the project called Cross-Cultural Slavic Studies, conducted at the Slavic Department, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan since 1994 primarily on the basis of Polish and Serbo-Croatian evidence;
- b) to point at possible generalizations of these results using an approach rooted in the field where pragmatics overlaps with cognitive as well as cross-cultural linguistics and psychology.

The analysis which will be presented here involves pragmatics, cognitive science and intercultural studies. Such analysis is an example of pragmatics as an interdisciplinary area, i.e. a mongrel borrowing from other domains, but also lending ideas to them. It will be shown that this mongrel status of pragmatics is indeed necessary to give a comprehensive account of intricate relations between languages and their respective cultures.

### 2. A conceptual map

Cross-cultural and cognitive-linguistic approaches have been used as a general framework for analysis in this paper. That is, I have adopted the view that: "In natural language meaning consists in human interpretation of the world. It is subjective, it is anthropocentric, it reflects predominant cultural concerns and culture-specific modes of social interaction as much as any objective features of the world 'as such'" (Wierzbicka, 1988:2). Furthermore, the analysis will

use the etic:emic distinction and the set of ideas behind it, recently discussed in Pike (1996). As is generally known, this line of thought is rooted both in the tradition of anthropological linguistics (from Humboldt to Whorf) and cross-cultural psychology (from Wundt to Osgood and Triandis).

Two other adopted propositions stem from cognitive linguistics. I assume that: a) language is primarily symbolic in its nature, and b) that grammatical structures cannot be looked upon as autonomous from lexicon, or as Langacker puts it: „Grammatical structures do not constitute an autonomous formal system or level of representation: they are claimed instead to be inherently symbolic, providing for the structuring and conventional symbolization of conceptual content. Lexicon, morphology, and syntax form a continuum of symbolic units, divided only arbitrarily into separate components...” (Langacker (1991:1).

### 3. Emerging questions

If we apply the claim that there are links between language and culture to a comparison of the two Slavic languages in question, then this means at least two things: a) the differences of two cultural codes are mirrored in these two languages, and b) linguistic differences contribute to the differences in the sphere of culture. Consider the following two examples. Writing about the war in the former Yugoslavia, the Polish journalist Dawid Warszawski describes the situation in which a woman from Croatia addresses Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a former Polish prime minister as follows:

(1) *Gdyby pan premier, będąc w Vukovarze, mógł o niego zapytać tamtejsze władze...*

‘Mr. Prime Minister, if you could, when you are Vukovar, ask the local authorities about him’

(Warszawski, 1995)

The Serbo-Croatian equivalent of this sentence (i.e. the source sentence) is:

(1') *Da li biste, kad budete u Vukovaru, mogli za njega pitati tamošnje vlasti*

'If you<sup>1</sup> could, when you are in Vukovar, ask the local authorities about him'

As we can see, the reporter has changed the original utterance by introducing the way Poles address each other in formal manner. This is a part of a wider Polish cultural scheme, in which, in formal situations, practically everybody has to be addressed by his/her title (*magister, doktor, profesor, dziekan, rektor, mecenas, redaktor, kierownik, prezes...*), while one uses a higher title to address a person of a lower rank (as in using the form *dziekan* 'dean' to address a *prodziekan* 'vice dean'). Moreover, one uses titles to address those who do not perform the function in question any more (as we can see from the example with Mr. Mazowiecki). Interestingly, Polish forms of address include phrases like *klaniam się* 'I bow down (to you)' when greeting somebody or *szuję pomocą* 'I serve you with my help' when expressing one's willingness to help. Finally, one points to him-/herself using the phrase *moja osoba* 'my person' and expressing her will by phrases like *pragnę powiedzieć* 'I would like to say', literally, 'I am craving to say'.<sup>2</sup> All this is not common in Serbo-Croatian, and this is a clear case where two languages reflect two different cultural patterns. The higher importance of formal address in Polish than in Serbo-Croatian or Russian can also be seen from the fact that Polish has five different items used in formal address (*Pan* 'Mister'/*Pani*'Mis'/*Panowie* 'Gentlemen'/*Panie* 'Ladies'/*Państwo* 'Ladies and Gentlemen') where Serbo-Croatian and Russian have only one (*Vi* 'you, 2<sup>nd</sup> person Plural'/*Wy*'you, 2<sup>nd</sup> person Plural'). Similar to this are instances of the so-called culture-bound lexemes, numerous examples of which can be found in Kaliszewska (1997).

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<sup>1</sup> In Serbo-Croatian it is sufficient to use the 2nd person plural pronominal form of address.

<sup>2</sup> All these Polish forms are, however, old-fashioned thus rarely used nowadays.

On the other hand, there are numerous examples where relations of cultures and languages are not so transparent, as has been shown in Šipka (1998a):

<i>Tamo je tobogan vodeni. Moći ću da sa nje koristim.</i>	sentence with Polish interference
<i>Tamo je vodeni tobogan. Moći ću da ga koristim.</i>	standard Serbo-Croatian
Tam jest zjeżdźalnia wodna. Będę mógł z niej korzystać.	standard Polish
There is a water slide over there. I will be able to use it.	translation

There are two differences in this example: a) the word order (In the examples here the modifier in Serbo-Croatian is used pre-nominally, as opposed to its post-nominal position in Polish. It is worth noting, however, that the Polish word order in most cases coincides with the Serbo-Croatian one. On intricacies of the modifier-noun combinations in Polish, cf. Fisiak et al 1978: 81ff); b) verbal valence (*korzystać z + Gen* in Polish versus *koristiti + Acc* in Serbo-Croatian). It is not clear if one conceptualizes the modifier differently when it precedes as opposed to following after it. Likewise, it is not clear whether one conceptualizes the act of using something differently because the verb in that language governs the Accusative without prepositions as opposed to the prepositional Genitive.

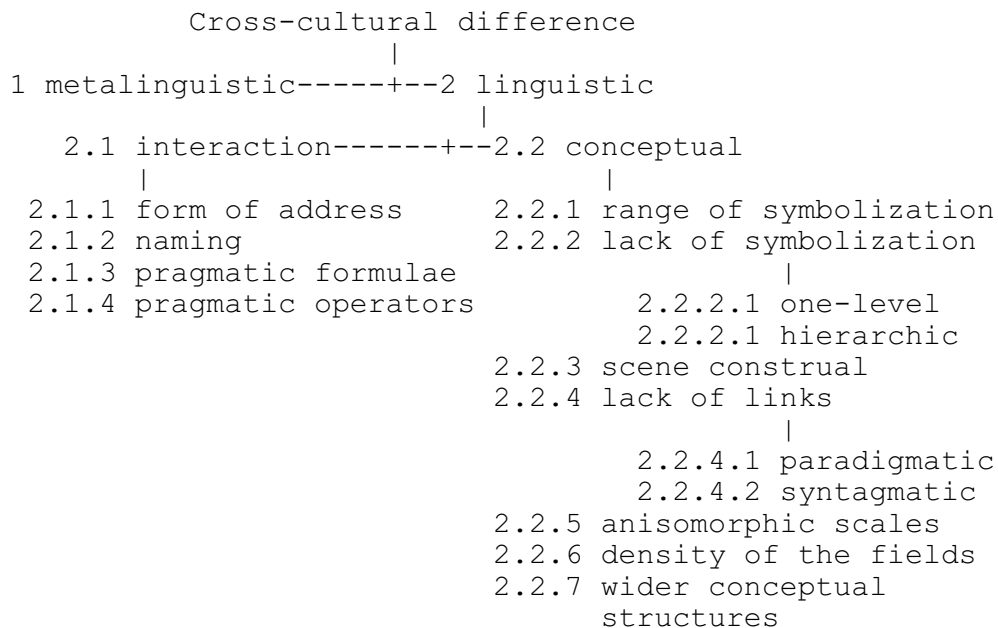
Examples like these bring us to the following questions:

- a) Where can we find correlations between language and culture?
- b) How can we demonstrate these correlations?
- c) What kind of correlations can we identify?
- d) What are the consequences of these correlations to Slavic studies?

It is a matter of course that I will not be able to answer to all these questions here. Instead, I will propose a taxonomy of the differences between Polish and Serbo-Croatian which can be related to the differences between these cultures. Such a taxonomy can be a first step in answering the questions mentioned above.

#### 4. A Tentative Taxonomy

The proposed taxonomy of cross-cultural differences looks as follows:



By metalinguistic differences, I mean a situation in which a community consciously shapes its language, such as in the process of developing the standard language in general, or any of its terminologies (e.g. computational, medical, technical, etc.). In all those cases the cultural norms, which are not incorporated in the language, influence the form of language as independent factors. My own investigation of Polish and Serbian computing terminology (Šipka 1998b) has shown that the Serbian terminology stabilizes considerably slower than its Polish counterpart (on an average exhibiting 1.41 equivalents of one English term as opposed to 1.21 in Polish). Similar results have been obtained by Serafin (1998) and Çakolli (1998) with regard to car-mechanic and economic terminology, respectively. One possible explanation is that the confrontational patterns of the Balkan cultures (which were particularly salient during the recent decade of ethnic conflicts in the region) make it more difficult for their speakers to come to an agreement about which terminology is to be used.

As to linguistic differences, they reflect cases where language and culture are interwoven, in which cultural traits are incorporated into the substance of language. Among linguistic differences, one can differentiate between interaction differences, i.e. those that come into existence in speech acts and under no other circumstances, vs. conceptual differences, which influence one's cognitive functioning as a whole, when, for example, one language has a lexicalization (as defined by Lipka 1992:95), and the other does not.

Among the interaction differences we can identify four groups. First, there are differences in addressing one's interlocutor on formal occasions, which was mentioned above. Second, as observed by Wierzbicka (1990: 71-104), Polish tends to use shorter forms of some proper names in informal address (i.e. forms like: *Ania* rather than *Anna*, *Kasia* rather than *Katarzyna*, etc.) as neutral whereas Serbo-Croatian has full forms as neutral. The same is true for naming goods one wants to buy in a grocery store. In Polish one normally uses diminutives *mleczko* 'milk', *chlebek* 'bread', *maselko* 'butter', *bułeczka* 'roll', etc and Serbo-Croatian full forms *mlijeko* 'milk', *hljeb* 'bread', *maslac* 'butter', *zemička* 'bagel', etc. Intercultural differences in this field have also been attested in Dressler and Merlini Barbaresi (1994) and Klimaszewska (1984). Third, Serbo-Croatian has pragmatic formulae like *Crko dabogda!* 'Drop dead, for God's sake' which are not common in Polish, and it is also true of every language that it has its idiosyncratic idioms, fixed expressions, etc. Finally, these two languages differ in their inventory of pragmatic operators. For example, Polish has the exclamation 'o' (used when something has been found or one remembers something), which is non-existent in Serbo-Croatian. Budzińska (1998) provides numerous other examples of such differences between these two languages. Further examples of intercultural differences in the field of interjections can be found Wierzbicka (1991: chapter 8)

Among very common conceptual differences are those concerning the range of symbolization.<sup>3</sup> Thus one Russian symbolization *djadja* ‘uncle’ comprises two Polish symbolizations (*wuj* ‘maternal uncle’, *stryj* ‘paternal uncle’), and three Serbo-Croatian (*ujak* ‘maternal uncle’, *stric* ‘paternal uncle’, *tetak* ‘husband of one’s father’s sister’)<sup>4</sup>. The other way round, Serbo-Croatian has only one word for church (*crkva*), Polish has two of them (*kościół* ‘Catholic or any other church’ and *cerkiew* ‘Ortodox church’), whereas Russian has three of them (*cerkov* ‘Ortodox church’, *kostjol* ‘Polish Catholic church’, *kirka* ‘Lutheran church’). The same phenomenon can be found in grammar. In the plural of adjective declension, Russian has only one form for all three genders, Polish has two (masculine-personal and non-masculine-personal, or virile vs. non-virile, respectively), while Serbo-Croatian has three genders (masculine, feminine, neuter). Similar examples can be found in Dębińska (1998), where we can see that the symbolization of directions using prepositional phrases is much more precise in Serbo-Croatian than in Polish. Polish uses *do* + *Gen*, where Serbo-Croatian differentiates *do* + *Gen*, *na* + *Acc*, *u* + *Acc*, *uz* + *Acc*, or Dative without preposition.

The second major conceptual difference is the absence of symbolization in one of two languages. This problem is well known from language teaching and translation practice (culture-bound lexemes, Slavic verb aspect, etc.). It should be emphasized here that these examples belong to two different categories. On the one hand, we have the one-level absence of symbolizations, such as in Serbian *slava*, ‘family saint’s day’, which does not exist in Polish. On the other hand, we have a hierarchical absence of symbolization such as in Polish *rodzeństwo* ‘sibling’, which is a generalization for one’s brother and sister and which does not have any Serbo-Croatian equivalent.

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<sup>3</sup> Under symbolization I understand representaton of conceptual categories in linguistic signs, both lexical and grammatical

One of very frequent conceptual differences is related to the way one construes scenes in two languages. The Polish verb *przepraszać* ‘excuse oneself’ assumes a scene where we are giving somebody our excuses *przepraszać* + Acc (in the scene one who is ‘guilty’ ‘excuses’ the one to whom s/he is guilty), whereas the reflexive Serbo-Croatian *izvinjavati se* ‘excuse oneself’ assumes an impersonal excusing of oneself. In Russian, however, one asks (orders) her interlocutor to excuse her (*izvinite menja*). Numerous examples of such differences can be found in Borowska (1998) and Wilk (1998).

The categories mentioned so far refer to the language symbols taken in isolation. There are, however, differences which can be observed only in the language system as a whole. One language can have links which are non-existent in the other. This pertains to both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. Thus, Serbo-Croatian and Russian have a paradigmatic link between *čaj/čaj* ‘tea’ and *čajnik/čajnik* ‘tea-pot,’ and Polish does not have it in its pair *herbata* ‘tea’ vs. *czajnik*, ‘tea-pot’. Similarly, Polish has syntagmatic links between *wielki* ‘great’, and *emocje* ‘emotions’, *tenis* ‘tennis’, which do not exist in Serbo-Croatian, where *veliki* ‘great’, cannot be used with those nouns (rather *jake emocije*, lit. ‘strong emotions’, and *tenis na visokom nivou*, lit. ‘high-level tennis’).

Similar to the previous category are certain anisomorphic scales in the two languages. Thus on the temperature scale, Polish has a more differentiated low-temperature end, whereas Serbo-Croatian has a more precise high-temperature end of the scale of its scale, as we can see from the following example.

hot	cold
<u>gorący</u> - ciepły - letni - <u>chłodny</u> - zimny	
<u>vreo</u> - vruć - topao - mlak - <u>hladan</u>	

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<sup>4</sup> On family relation terms, cf. e.g. Wierzbicka (1992)



Similarly, systems can differ in density of their lexical fields. Thus, Serbo-Croatian has many more obscene lexemes than Polish, which can be seen from Pecyna (1998), who attested, for example, 196 Serbo-Croatian and only 30 Polish lexemes for penis.

Finally, the last category to be discussed here is related to the wider conceptual structures, mostly idioms. To exemplify this, let us look at the Polish idiom *złatwić coś krakowskim targiem* 'to settle an issue by mutual concessions', which is non-existent in Serbo-Croatian. Serbo-Croatian, on the other hand, has the idiom *Bog Bogova* 'the almighty, literally: the God of all gods', which does not exist in Polish. Numerous examples of this kind can be found in Przewoźna (1999), as well as in Polish - Serbo-Croatian Idiom Dictionary by Menac and Pintarić (1986).

Let me stress that the taxonomy which has been presented is just a list of differences which, because of their relevance to the cognitive and sociopsychological sphere, might be considered cross-cultural differences. This is just a first step in answering the four previously mentioned questions.

## 5. Conclusions

The taxonomy and its examples have shown that the two observed languages, although being closely related genetically, differ considerably when being contrasted from a cross-cultural perspective. At the same time, one could see that lexical and grammatical differences fall into the same categories. This has at least three consequences. First, in any project of applied linguistics (language teaching, lexicography, etc.) one should take these differences into consideration. Second, the results support claims reiterated by Wierzbicka, Pike, and others about relations of languages and their respective cultures. Third, it supports Langacker's negation of the autonomy of grammatical structures.

In addition, the interim results of this project show that pragmatics needs to be embedded in a network of linguistic and extralinguistic disciplines and that any analysis of such intricate data should take into consideration the large body of knowledge from linguistics, anthropology, cognitive sciences, as well as social sciences in general. As has been shown in other papers in this volume, pragmatics has to borrow methods and techniques from other disciplines, being thus a mongrel with various, and sometimes distant and seemingly contradictory features.

Further goals of this project are twofold. First, it should build applied linguistic tools to cope with such cross-cultural and cross-linguistic differences. Second, it should find mechanisms of testing and proving that these differences are indeed culture-related. Both these goals assume complex research in the field of overlapping of pragmatics and other linguistic disciplines on the one hand and cross-cultural psychology on the other.

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*<ftp://main.amu.edu.pl/pub/Serbo-Croat>*

*00-index.txt describes the contents of the archive*

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