



LINGUISTICALLY INTERCONNECTING CULTURES

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on a few aspects of language use which reflect the culture of a speech community. More specifically it discusses the role and function of connectors, as text connecting devices, particularly two important connective hyponyms, particles and interjections. Given their intercultural pragmatic values, these linguistic devices are compared in English and Albanian so as to display both their diversity and similarity in the respective cultures. The comparative analyses will attempt to show that the cultural diversity and similarity are reflected in language use by redefining the intercultural context.*

Keywords: *(inter)connectivity, connectors, particles, interjections, culture, cultural aspects*

1. INTRODUCTION

The interrelationship between language and culture has been highlighted in a large number of studies, including linguistics, sociolinguistics, translation, language acquisition etc. Risager (2006:1) states that “this has led to intensified research into how cultural differences express themselves and are created via various forms of linguistic practice and discourse, how culturally different conceptual systems and world views are contained in the semantics and pragmatics systems of the various languages” In this regard, cultural context of language use in speech communities becomes particularly relevant to the nature of language and to the community in which it is used. Even more emphatic is the triangle of language, culture and speech community in the following Senft’s statement. “Language has to be seen first of all as a cultural achievement and as a cultural tool. Language is a mirror of the culture of its speech community” (Senft, 2009:6). One good example of this is in Canada, where French-speaking natives of Quebec attempt to maintain their cultural identity in front of the English-speaking majority. Other examples include the

following two. For instance, it is still a common phenomenon in the Albanian speaking community to show tokens of friendliness to people they meet by asking a number of question to them in regard to their work, health, family life and so on. This linguistic practice is certainly inherited from a past cultural background, from the communist period, and seems to continue even nowadays, although, I should admit not as frequently as it used to. To a westerner such cultural context is not reflected in language use or vice-versa. Another typical case in Albanian would be the rare use of the vocatives Sir or Madam (Zotëri or Zonjë) in front of names of people you do not know when you address to them directly (unless you are in formal or official situations). On the contrary, this language practice is frequently found in Romanian with the vocatives Domnule or Doamna, as far as I know. This is again culturally inherited from the past in the Albanian speech community. These two very simple examples of linguistic practice served to show somehow that “... linguistic practice is always cultural ... it is in itself a form of cultural (meaningful) practice, and because it is embedded in a larger cultural (meaningful) context on which it leaves its own mark” (Risager, 2006:3).

LINGUISTICALLY INTERCONNECTING CULTURES

2. LINGUISTIC (INTER)CONNECTIVITY

The following section discusses briefly the nature, role and function of connectors in realizing connectivity and interconnectivity in linguistic practices. Connectors make up an open linguistic class which consists of various forms of grammatical classes (such as conjunctions or adverbials), lexical items (such as performative verbs) or different linguistic items/constructions (such as particles or interjections). They are not part of the sentence proposition and are normally semantically and syntactically detached to the sentence in which they are used. Connectors function both in the local and global level of the text / discourse and display not only semantic (linguistic) textual/discursive features or values but also pragmatic (extralinguistic) ones.

As such, they are regarded to be one of the most important connective devices which enable textuality and commonly secure textual cohesion and coherence. de Beaugrande (1980) observes that cohesion includes “sequential connectivity” in text, which is enabled, among other devices, through connectors. Thus, one way of connecting different sequences of a text is through connectors. On the other hand, coherence includes knowledge, the “conceptual connectivity” of which is (re)constructed and perceived within the text. Thus, coherence comprises logic connections, “knowledge of how events, actions, objects, and situations are organized; and the striving for continuity in human experience” (de Beaugrande 1980). This last one is particularly important in understanding the role and function of two important connective hyponyms, interjections and particles, since, as it will be discussed in the next section of this paper, they enable connectivity between linguistic aspects of language practice, but more often than not, between metalinguistic ones, which include worldview perceptions and interpretations.

3. “INTERJECTING” PARTICLES

Some scholars like Agalliu *et al.* (1995: 413) state that “a particle is an uninflected

word class which is used to express meaning or complementary emotional nuances for a word, a phrase or an entire sentence.” Similarly, Kole (1969) classifies particles as a lexical and semantic category which typically expresses modality, emotion and expressiveness. However, modern studies suggest that particles could be better seen as connectors which enable textual and metatextual (inter)connectivity. For instance, Aijmer (2002:2) observes that “discourse particles have been grammaticalized which has resulted in a class of words with unique formal, functional and pragmatic properties. Nevertheless neither sentence grammar nor logical semantics has had much to say about them. They are difficult to analysed grammatically and their literal meanings are “overridden” by pragmatic functions involving the speaker’s relationship to the hearer, to the utterance or the whole text.”

Thus, particles could be seen as linguistic items which potentially interconnect metatextual aspects to linguistic practices or the speaker to the utterance, as it was quoted above. By metatextual aspects I refer to all those features that interact with texts in a given linguistic context. Such could be, speaker’s intentionality, attitude, statement pragmatic force, social and cultural identity or cultural values etc. Unlike some other connective hyponyms, particles of a certain language are closely connected to the culture of that language. So, there is no wonder that particles are used frequently in our daily verbal interactions and that their role and function are often considered irreplaceable. Wierzbicka (2003:341) underlines the fact that very few linguistic aspects can better reflect the culture of a speech community than particles and that on very few occasions could one find equivalents for them from one language to the other.

The problematic matter of the equivalence of particles can be noticed at a macrolinguistic level, namely from language to language, such as the example of the particle *ore* in Albanian (used conventionally to attract attention to the hearer in relation to the forthcoming conversation), which has no English

LINGUISTICALLY INTERCONNECTING CULTURES

equivalent. Or it can even be noticed at the microlinguistic level, namely from region to region of the same country. For instance, the same particle *ore* is used in a very informal way in the area where I live to greet someone one knows very well. Otherwise, its use in other situations would sound harsh or impolite. This simple example is one sign of the cultural aspect that is included in its pragmatic use, but, above all, in its enabling interconnectivity between speaker, hearer, their relation to the cultural background, text or discourse etc.

Like particles, (Agalliu *et al.*, 1995: 427) interjections have also been seen as linguistic items which are used to express speaker's perceptions, feelings, preferences etc. Similarly, this perspective avoids their role and function in relation to text and the interconnectivity between it and additional metatextual aspects, especially cultural ones. Moreover, as Schiffrin (1987:73) observes, the use of interjections is based more on their distribution within the text rather than on their semantic meaning or grammatical status. This fact becomes particularly relevant if one considers the fact that interjections, like many particles, are polysemantic and polyfunctional. Thus, interjections interconnect sequences of texts, depending on their position used in it, and conceptions in relation to parts of text.

However, unlike particles, interjections (Fischer, 2000:14-16) signal the spontaneous expression of the speaker's cognitive state. Still, interjections interconnect metatextual aspects which interact with texts in a given linguistic context, because, as Schourup (1982:13-14) highlights, they are related to the speaker's internal state, represent reflections of one's personal world (cognitive aspects) and mostly depend on the text interpretation in which they are used.

For instance, the interjection *man* in English is speaker-oriented and is normally used to express surprise in relation to an event, situation, emotional state or linguistic practice. Its fulfillment of the (meta)textual interconnectivity is typical of the Anglophone people, since it reflects gender stereotypes as part of their past culture, which are still reflected nowadays in English. Probably, not

every native English speaker is aware of the fact, but they still use it unconsciously to reflect their "inherited cultural and personal world". To some extent, the Albanian equivalents for *man* would be *ua* or *ou*, but these interjections are *only* used to express speaker's surprise to a linguistic event.

To conclude this section, particles and interjections enable interconnectivity between textual sequences and metatextual concepts, such as cultural aspects, which are partially demonstrated through their pragmatic values and distribution in texts. As such they are open to interpretations, pragmatic effects and cultural reflections. Language practice in general and particles and interjections in particular are "...to be conceived as an integral part of culture and society and of the psyche..." (Risager, 2006:3).

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

In this short section I will attempt to contrast some common particles and interjections between Albanian and English in order to gain a better understanding of them.

There are basically three main phenomena to be noticed when particles are compared in both languages. Firstly, some particles find their equivalents in the other language. For instance, the particle *nejse* in the first example below has its functional equivalent particle *anyway* in English, as illustrated in the second example.

- (1) *Nejse*, të mos zgjatemi.
- (2) Oh, I doubt if they'd mind. Particularly the dead ones. *Anyway*, what's the big deal?

Other common and important particles with pragmatic equivalence are *tani-now*, *pastaj-then*, *sigurisht-sure* etc. They are all very similar to each other and are used much or less the same way in both languages. I believe that they constitute or represent those universal cultural aspects which can be expressed through linguistic practices.

Secondly, there are certain particles that do find counterparts from Albanian to English,

LINGUISTICALLY INTERCONNECTING CULTURES

but are represented with different word classes, although they still fall within the category of connectors. For instance, the particle *ndoshta* in Albanian in example (3) below has its functional counterpart *maybe* in English, as illustrated in example (4).

(3) *Ndoshta*, nuk e di.

(4) *Maybe* one day the search for the perfect sentence will end with one of yours.

The difference in regard to the word classes in these cases might not even be relevant to the fact that these items have the same function in the text. This seems to be a sign of slight linguistic diversities within the linguistic universality. Other examples would be *mbase* or *kushedi* in Albanian and *perhaps* in English, which happen to be synonymous to the abovementioned particles.

Thirdly, there are certainly some particles in both languages which either do not find a close equivalent in the other language or do not exist at all in one or the other. For instance, it is not easy to find an English equivalent for the particle *ore* in example (5). And it is still even more difficult to find a counterpart in Albanian for *well* in example

(6) below.

(5) *Ore*, a dëgjon ç'të thonë?

(6) *Well*, I think that it's time that they admit that.

These two particles constitute those linguistic practice cases which are regarded to be culturally specific. And sometimes it could be very hard to even paraphrase a particle or explain the reason for using it in certain a context. The particle *demek* in Albanian in example (7) is one of these cases.

(7) Bënte, *demek*, sikur s`dinte gjë.

The sentence can be translated as *(S)he pretended as if (s)he didn't know anything*. It appears difficult to find an equivalent for

demek in English. However, its pragmatic meaning is somehow included in the verb *pretended!* But still the sentence in English, for some reason, lacks "the original cultural aspect".

Some other common particles which seem to be cultural specific in Albanian are *ama*, *desh*, *gjoja*, *madje* or *çne* and in English *you see*, *you know*, *I mean* or *right*. It is also worth mentioning the fact that most of them are polysemantic and their use and perception or interpretation highly depends on the kind of connectivity that they realize in language practice. For instance, the particle *you know* in example (8) enables connectivity between the sentence, its propositional content and the speaker's uncertainty of his speech continuation.

(8) I thought I'd, *you know*, have a chat with you.

(9) Wear the white dress, *you know*, the one with all the black embroidery.

While *you know* in example (9) interrupts the textual sequence only to realize connectivity between it and the speaker's attempt to clarify the intended referential object.

With interjections similarities and differences are slightly different. It is not the aim of this section, neither of this paper, to analyze and to bring here cultural background explanations such as was the case with the interjection *man* discussed in the third section. Nevertheless, it is arguably the case to strongly believe that, like particles, interjections are closely related to the culture of the speech community in which they are used as part of linguistic practices.

A large number of interjections seem to be universally conventionalized, and they sometimes resemble international words, such as kilometer, alcohol or bank. Some examples are *ah*, *aha*, *eh*, *oh* etc., which can either be associated with the proceeding part of the text or alone, as a free sentence. In both cases their use is motivated by metalinguistic factors such as pain, surprise, complaint, dislike etc.

LINGUISTICALLY INTERCONNECTING CULTURES

Some other interjections have counterparts in the other language. They mainly express greetings, as for instance *mirëmëngjesi* – *good morning*, gratitude, such as the example *faleminderit* – *thank you* or wishes as *udha e mbarë* – *have a nice trip* or *bon voyage* (although this last one is not very English). But even in these cases one can find cultural differences. For instance, the Albanian interjection *të / ju bëftë mirë* has no counterpart in English, apart from the French one *bon appétit*, which is used sometimes in English. Certainly, I do not want to believe that in the English speaking community people do not usually wish someone enjoyment of the meal they are about to eat!

I am inclined to believe, however, that cross-linguistic studies would provide us with much more insight into cultural aspects represented in language practices. Furthermore, these studies should not only be restricted to contrasting particles and interjections, but should also take into consideration and analyze other aspects of language use, which carry cultural aspects and which enable the interconnection of cultures.

5. CONCLUSIONS

My own definition or perhaps redefinition of interconnecting different cultures and cultural backgrounds through language practices is not only the discovery of similarities or differences between or among them, but also the reconception of cultural transmission and its perception in or through language use. Such was the case with our short contrastive analyses of particles and interjections in Albanian and English.

Thus, in order to linguistically interconnect cultures one has to consider that, as Risager (2006:4) observes, "... the difference between languages are relative. In every language ... there are items that are specific to precisely this language, other items that it shares with certain other languages, and some that are assumed to be universal... All languages are thus, to varying degrees, bearers of both the

linguistically particular and the linguistically universal. Something similar applies to the cultural forms and relations: some are specific, some are more or less widespread, and some must be assumed to be universal...".

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