

WISHES AS BENE- AND MALEFACTIVE SPEECH ACTS. ON THE BASIS OF DISCREDITING PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES IN THE POLISH LOWER HOUSE

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Abstract. What will be analysed in the paper, from the pragmalinguistic perspective, is the specificity and the positioning of wishes in an MP's speech as a particular type of text. In my research, I would like to shed some light on the multifunctioning of such speech acts in the public performances, to which parliamentary speeches belong, which stems from the multitude of their addressees. I will be particularly interested in the change of the illocutionary force of wishes which, thanks to the influence of the irony that they contain, may serve the opposition politicians to mock the ruling party's MPs. This, in turn, can indirectly lead to the disparagement of the latter. In a broader sense it can also be the result of a general persuasive function of all political speeches.

The marking of irony is very specific for a given culture or even the idiolect of particular MPs. The precise knowledge of the possible indirect readings of some MPs' utterances, and the techniques for deciphering ironic expressions would be very valuable for interpreters who have just recently begun their work in e.g. the European Parliament, where the speeches of MPs are interpreted simultaneously.

Key words: benefactive speech act, malefactive speech act, parliamentary speech, idiolect

Wishes are specific speech acts. Their utterance is usually associated with something positive (we typically wish somebody goodluck, health, a passed exam, etc.) so they are mostly classified as the so-called benefactive speech acts.

According to Prokop (2010, 123-127), benefactive speech acts belong to the subgroup of direct expressive speech acts (and this group in turn belongs to the

expressive speech acts, i.e. group C). Benefactive speech acts (C 2.1) (Lat. bene = good) are linguistics behaviour in which the illocutionary force is as follows:

“The speaker wishes p to the addressee.

The speaker wishes the addressee that p comes true.

P means

- events and phenomena in the life of the addressee as a result of which the addressee experiences goodness;
- these events are supposed to happen in the near or distant future.” (ibid. 2010: 126).

According to Prokop, this group includes such speech acts as name-day wishes, birthday wishes, wedding wishes, jubilee wishes, birth wishes and others, congratulations on a promotion, a reward, an honorable mention, success as well as holiday greetings (which should in fact be divided into greetings, i.e. wishes of health, and travel reports, a comment by MJ). The perlocution of these speech acts is a positive change or the maintenance of the addressee’s positive attitude towards the sender. Analogically, malefactive speech acts are those types of acts in which the proposition p means events and phenomena as a result of which the addressee experiences harm (ibid: 127, 128).

In some situations wishes may be the so-called malefactive speech acts, though. After all, we may wish something bad to somebody. In such cases we will be dealing with curses. Curses are often uttered in the absence of the people that they are directed at because they upset the balance of interactions and are a risk of losing face. If uttered directly to somebody, they may hurt that person significantly.

According to Zgółka (2005), a wish is a strongly conventionalised speech act form and it is, as a rule, based on what he calls a language pattern which refers to the lexicon, phraseology and syntax. When it comes to the semantic-communicative layer, the frames of arbitrariness are wider. Zgółka points out the fact that from the communicative point of view one may place wish speech acts in between positive wishes and curses and swear words. While writing about the lexico-syntactic structure of wishes, Zgółka states that its full form should have the status of an affirmative sentence built around the verb to wish (or synonyms thereof) whereas the subject of a wish sentence should be a personal noun or, more frequently, a 1st person plural personal pronoun. The government of such a verb is multilayered: to wish (something) to somebody (or, less frequently, to something else, e.g. to the blessed house that...) or to wish something to oneself, as in a reflexive form. The government relates here also to what is being wished. In this case, it is possible to talk about creating room for a subordinate adverbial clause of purpose with such conjunctions as “that” and “so that” (ibid. 18). Zgółka points out at that moment that the pattern given may be either extended to a full text (for example, a letter, a speech or a toast) or shortened to an ellipsis.

One more aspect of expressing wishes will be illustrated in my project, namely ironic wishes included in the parliamentary speeches of Polish Lower House MPs and the German Bundestag MPs. It turns out that in the case of some MPs the expression of a wish may become a malefactive act, because it is not the well-being of the person to which it is directed that is the goal. The main aim of the wish in such a case is to discredit a given person through derision. This also entails a general persuasive function of all parliamentary speeches: their purpose is first of all to gain maximal support from potential voters.

To analyse the specific features of wishes in the context of parliamentary speeches the project assumes:

- the identification of the characteristic features of this speech act on the basis of accessible subject literature from the area of pragmatics;
- on this basis an algorithm will be created to help identify wishes in a corpus of text;
- next, the wishes made by parliamentarians will be scrutinised in order to identify the features which enable the assignment of wishes into bene- and malefactive speech acts (the use of irony will be included here, among other things).

In the next step a comparison of wishes made in the Polish Lower House and the German Bundestag will be prepared in order to examine possible similarities and differences in the domain of wish use (for example, their culturally-specific features and the frequency of occurrence).

To identify benefactive speech acts in the speeches of MPs, a description of the notions “to wish something to somebody” and “a wish” will be created for Polish and German on the basis of accessible references. Possible similarities between such speech acts and other from the same category will also be given. Then an algorithm will be developed to enable the unambiguous assignment of a given utterance to wishes occurring in parliamentary speeches.

To find expressions containing wishes, the search engines of both parliaments’ websites will be used as well as the computer programme called TextStat3 which enables the count of word frequency in a given text corpus and the search of keywords in a context. Taking into account the correct mood of the verb, verb semantics, modal particles and, in the case of Polish, the particle “niech” would constitute the initial, purely grammatical, filter for searching apparent benefactive speech acts in parliamentary speeches. However, some of the wishes found may be expressed without irony. Therefore, an algorithm will be developed at the beginning of the project to help distinguish between ironic and entirely honest wishes.

Elementary studies designed this way may also have further application because they may help translation researchers to define what features characterise those speech acts and, later, how such speech acts should be translated. It would be of great importance for the education of future translators and interpreters working in

the European Union institutions, because the translation of indirect messages, which contain information encoded contextually with the use of irony, is a particularly difficult task, especially for interpreters.

Example

The case I'd like to present/describe here is an utterance marked by irony. This is the way of speaking which is based on purposeful contradiction, in other words, it is based on two levels of the utterance: direct and indirect. An example shown below illustrates rhetorical irony. (Rhetorical irony is the speaker's attitude through which he counters wrong or hostile views and which may be connected with such a presentation of the subject matter that reveals incoherence between what is said and what the speaker really thinks, see Szturc 1992: 5-6).

According to Ziomek, the most visible sign of irony is intonation (242), and in a literary work comments/opinions, which are more flattering than these which are actually implied in a text and which we should infer from a text (243). Other hints (for a literary scholar) are in the organization of a text, for example bracketed interjections or echoing the same phrase, which strengthens irony of this particular phrase (244).

In order to identify irony as a communicative practice, first of all we should scrutinise the context in which communicative practice takes place since this context is the key to detect irony (see Łaguna 2002:70).

According to Wójtowicz-Stefańska (2008:94) in order to detect irony in the text we need to:

- 1) see the ambiguity of the utterance
- 2) receive ironic signals and reject the literal meaning of the text
- 3) place the utterance in a proper context
- 4) see the implied meaning of the utterance.

What can help to understand irony is the awareness of its functions in the text, such as mockery, sarcasm or derision (see 94).

The simplest form of irony is antiphrasis. This is the opposition in meaning of the two levels of an utterance, where the main sense is antithetic to the sense expressed directly. In the case described here irony is concealed in the speaker's ostensible wish/advice directed at the addressee and performs the function of mocking the addressee's views, behavior, attitude, his features of character (satire) and aims at strengthening the thought and argument. It adds variety to the speech and tightens the bonds with the group and wins the public, in our case a potential group of voters. The technique used here is a wish as an ostensible encouragement, a piece of advice given to the victim of irony.

In reference to a multilayered speech act we would say, after Ausborn-Brinker (2003:11-12), that an ironic utterance is a very complex speech act which includes three aspects of intentionality:

- a) explicit intention to present a fact or the state of affairs
- b) explicit intention so that the addressee of an utterance thinks the author of the utterance thinks that something is true
- c) explicit intention to contradict for some reasons intention “a”.

The last one is usually the source of confusion for the listener, who, influenced by irony, starts looking for the true meaning of an utterance.

It is thus possible to present a multilayered speech act in the following way:

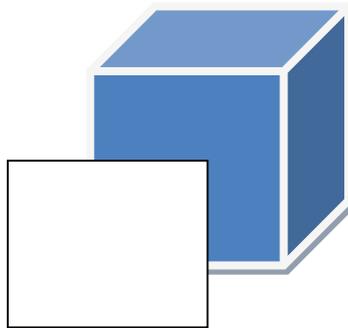


Fig. 1. Ironic multilayered speech act

A white rectangle represents here a new intention which is added to a multilayered speech act. Irony (the new intention) does not conceal totally the initial intention but gives it a different meaning. Ironic indirectness allows us to reduce a conflictual speech act potential because the intention filtered through irony seems to coincide with the preferences of the addressee. Since irony is based on the knowledge which both parties possess there is no doubt that irony will be detected. A critical appraisal of the partner is expressed indirectly, which minimalizes a threat of losing one's face (see Hartung 1998:144-145).

Let's look now at the afore mentioned extract from a parliamentary speech which will serve as an example of a multilayered ironic benefactive speech act.

This excerpt comes from a speech made by an MP Ludwik Dorn¹ on 5th February 2011 in the Polish Parliament in reference to the motion to dismiss from office the then Minister of National Defense, Edmund Klich. Dorn's whole speech is a critical assessment of Minister's achievements but the final part of it may be inter-

¹ <http://wpolityce.pl/artykuly/6032-do-poczytania-ludwik-dorn-przedstawia-w-sejmie-wniosek-o-odwolanie-ministra-klicha-mowa-parlamentarna-najwyzszej-proby>.

puted as a kind of mockery or even derision of what the minister accomplished. The final part, whose transcription is available on-line and includes also the reaction of the public given in brackets, is as follows:

“(…) I asked Mr Minister about tanker helmets in armoured troops. Well, it turns out that we have tanker helmets, modernised versions of “gustliki” (a term used by the speaker that refers to a character’s name in a very popular Polish TV series about a tank crew of WW2 *Four Tank-men and a dog*) – merriment in the audience – MP Stefan Niesiolowski: “put it on, put it on”. Helmets like these, in the neighbouring contry, the Czech Republic, are not used anymore because this kind of equipment – buzz and hum in the audience – has been withdrawn and replaced by ballistic helmets. Mr Minister, when I was a child I played *Four Tank-men and a dog* in the backyard. Well, Mr Minister, go and play the Armed Forces, but only in the backyard. And this is what I ask this House for. And I present this as a gift to you Mr Minister with all my human kindness – long lasting applause.

The underlined statement that comes from an excerpt of the whole speech is an example of a multilayered speech act which might be interpreted in a number of ways by the addressees at whom it is directed. And the following quoted underlined utterances are examples of singular predicates which, depending on an addressee might be understood differently.

Thus, the statement Well, Mr Minister, go and play the Armed Forces, but only in the backyard is delivered in the form of an order but it cannot be read as one since felicity conditions are not met here. An MP of the Opposition cannot give orders to a government minister. This statement delivered as an order to the minister can only be seen as ironic. The use of verbless sentence “but only in the backyard” and the phrase “go and play” in reference to an adult performing a high public function is clear irony and may be seen as offensive.

The ironic benefactive speech act discussed here is further complicated by the context of the other two speech acts that follow and by the presence of other addressees. The addressees are either called directly: this House or exist in the MP’s mind as a group of viewers in front of their TV sets and are indirect receivers of his speech. So MP Dorn first directly addresses Minister Klich, (which in Polish is realized through a particle “niech”, indicative mood for the third person singular of the verb “to play”, and a polite addressative form Mr), and then changes the addressee of his speech and says: And this is what I ask this House for. So an order given to the Minister can only be executed after it has been accepted by the supreme institution, in this case Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament), which is called here this House. This is a clear request made by Dorn to other MPs to vote Mr Klich out of office. Since the person who is to be dismissed is in the chamber Mr Dorn tries to weaken his initial mockery by presenting a gift and talking about it as a sing of his human kindness in his next utterance And I present this as a gift to you

Table 1. Analysis of speech acts in MP Dorn's parliamentary speech

Context (of an utterance)	Propositional content of the underlined parts in the excerpt	The person this phrase is addressed to/ The addressee	Illocution	Illocution indicator	Irony indicator
A speech by a non-attached MP Ludwik Dorn under the authority and on behalf of parliamentary caucus Law and Justice (PiS), where Ludwik Dorn presents a justification for a motion of censure against Defence Minister Bogdan Klich	1. (well [play, (Mr Minister, the Armed Forces)] [but [play (Mr Minister, in, backyard)])	1. Defence Minister Bogdan Klich	1. Order, advice	1. Particle „niech” (in the English translation not needed) + affirmative clause, 3rd person singular verb in Polish (in the English translation 2nd person singular): The Polish meaning of the verb „bawić się” (translated as „play”) used in the discussed line may be connected with another Polish phrase „baw się dobrze”, which means „have a good time”, and may be also used to address an adult. However, the phrase used in the discussed line suggests a reference to children's games [to play hide and seek or to play house].	1. Kind of irony: Antiphrasis: a juxtaposition of a salutation 'Mr Minister' with the phrase 'to play something', which is typical in reference to children
	2 (and[ask, I, for, this])	2. The Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament)/potential voters, viewers in front of their TV sets watching the debate	2. request ¹ to Sejm/ wishing oneself and voters		2. Technique: ostensible encouragement, a piece of advice to the victim, a wish
	3. (and [present, I, Mr Minister, gift, this, with, kindness, all, human])	3. Defence Minister Bogdan Klich	3.declarative act	3. The tanker helmet as a gift, a reference to a well-known film in pop culture <i>Four tank-men and a dog</i> . The film was criticised for a trivial presentation of warfare.	3. Function: mocking the views, behaviour, attitude and character of the opponent (satirical function)

¹ See agitation after Laskowska (2012, 13): „Agitation in parliamentary speeches consists of encouragement of the addressee to vote the way the speaker postulates”.

Mr Minister with all my human kindness. But if we are to read this utterance as a benefactive speech act, which is possible thanks to the third underlined statement, where Mr Dorn presents a tanker helmet as a gift, and benefactive speech acts (wishes) are often accompanied by gift giving (for example birthday wishes or wishes on other occasions), then offering an old-fashioned tanker helmet as a gift in the speaker's intention is only to strengthen irony and an additional offensive element in the speech. For this reason his utterance cannot be interpreted as the wish in the meaning of benefactive speech act (see Prokop 2010).

The example of an ironic benefactive speech act described here is even more complicated if we take into account the fact that Dorn ironically wishes Mr Minister good fun, while in fact he wishes to himself, MPs and voters to whom his speech is addressed that the Minister played the Armed Forces only in the backyard, in other word, that he didn't hold office of Defense Minister. Below, I present the analyses of the underlined sentence from Dorn's speech in the form of a table.

An analysis of such speech acts in a given language and a juxtaposition of constitutive elements of ironic benefactive speech acts in particular language pairs would help in the translator's work towards the analysis of any parallel texts in order to facilitate correct translation.

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