

PRAGMATEMES IN THE SITUATION OF EDUCATIONAL BILINGUALISM

The article focuses on the peculiarities of understanding and translating pragmatemes in the situation of educational bilingualism. We conducted a questionnaire [Pragmatemes] among 37 1–4 year students of the Bachelor Programme *Philology: English Language and Literature, Translation Studies* in order to find out students' knowledge of English pragmatemes. The results of the analysis of the questionnaire show that in most cases students, when translating a pragmateme, choose a false literal counterpart; they lack knowledge about synonymous pragmatemes and their communicative register. In addition, comprehension and usage of pragmatemes becomes more complicated if they reflect national or cultural specifics. The results of the research indicate that students find it difficult to choose an adequate translation of pragmatemes and recognize their semantic, stylistic and semantic-stylistic features. Students become hostages of both purely linguistic and linguistic-cultural interference. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the study of pragmatemes in the situation of educational bilingualism.

Keywords: pragmateme, interference, translation, synonymy, communicative register.

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ПРАГМАТЕМЫ В СИТУАЦИИ УЧЕБНОГО БИЛИНГВИЗМА

Данная статья посвящена особенностям понимания и перевода прагматем в ситуации учебного билингвизма. Мы провели опрос [Прагматемы] 37 студентов 1–4 курсов, обучающихся по профилю «Зарубежная филология: английский язык и литература», с целью выяснить, насколько студенты владеют прагматами английского языка. Результаты анализа опроса показывают, что в большинстве случаев студенты выбирают «ложный» дословный перевод прагматемы; респонденты не владеют синонимами-прагматами в полном объеме и не всегда знают, каким коммуникативный регистром обладают прагматы. Также особую сложность в понимании и употреблении вызывают прагматы, несущие национально-культурную специфику. Результаты исследования свидетельствуют о том, что студенты затрудняются при выборе адекватного перевода прагматем и распознавании их семантических, стилевых и семантико-стилистических особенностей, становясь заложниками как сугубо языковой, так и лингвокультурной интерференции. Следовательно, необходимо уделять большее внимание изучению прагматем в ситуации учебного билингвизма.

Ключевые слова: прагматема, интерференция, перевод, синонимия, коммуникативный регистр.

Introduction

Bless you! — *Будьте здоровы!* [lit. Be healthy!], *Will you marry me?* — *Ты выйдешь за меня?* [lit. Will you go after me?], *Out to lunch* — *Ушел на обед* [lit. Gone to lunch] — these seemingly heterogeneous phrases belong to the same class of linguistic entities, namely the class of pragmatemes.

The term was proposed by I. A. Melchuk [Melčuk, 1995] to denote phrases whose sphere of use is strictly limited by extralinguistic situation. For example, the pragmateme-warning “*Stand clear of the closing doors, please*” can be heard on the subway, whereas the pragmateme “*Queue Ahead*” is seen only on electronic road signs (see Pic.1).



Pic. 1. Pragmateme “Queue Ahead”

Picture 1 demonstrates that pragmatemes can be accompanied by various non-verbal signals (images, sounds or light).

Pragmatemes are widely used in oral and written speech and can be represented by questions, requests, prohibitions, warnings, notifications, orders or congratulations [Cybulskaya, 2019; Vorobey, 2011].

Probably, due to their ubiquity, according to the requirements of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the knowledge of stereotypical utterances such as greetings, civilities, signs and posters, notices on packages is required by the initial levels of foreign language acquisition, in particular, levels A1 and A2 of language proficiency proposed by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages¹.

It must be recognized that pragmatemes have completely undeservedly turned out to be on the periphery of the Russian researchers' inter-

¹ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2022). *Self-assessment grid — Table 2 (CEFR 3.3): Common Reference levels*. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>

ests. The qualitative and quantitative analysis of the publications on ready-made speech formulas showed that in the period from 2012 to 2021 out of 1008 scientific publications only 17 articles (less than 2 %) are devoted to the study of pragmatemes [Kayumova, Pakhomova, 2022]. Moreover, the articles are mainly of linguistic orientation and descriptive in nature, i. e. the definition of the concept and typology are given, the functioning of entities in oral or writing speech is studied or classifications of pragmatemes under different criteria are given (e. g. [Bogdanova-Beglaryan, 2014]).

This paper aims to partially compensate for the lack of empirical educational research on pragmatemes. The researchers set a task to find out to what extent bilingual Russian students are proficient in their knowledge of English pragmatemes and whether they are affected by inter-language interference.

Methods and materials

The main research tool was a questionnaire located at <https://forms.gle/fnK3wP8dgz3tXjBv8>. The questionnaire included twenty-eight multiple choice questions. The questions can be subdivided into 3 types according to the task that they set: (a) choose the best variant of translation of the Russian phrase into English, (b) fill in the gaps and (c) find the stylistically most appropriate variant.

The survey participants were 37 first- to fourth-year students enrolled into a Bachelor program *Philology: English Language and Literature, Translation Studies* in Leo Tolstoy Higher School of Russian and Foreign Philology, Kazan Federal University (Russia). The survey was anonymous and voluntary.

Results and discussion

According to the answers received, the respondents are artificial sequential bilinguals: the acquisition of a second language took place in an educational environment (primary school) about 10-15 years ago.

The majority of the respondents were 4th-year-students (62.2 %) followed by 1st-year-students and 3rd-year-students (21.6 % and 16.2 % respectively). In general, the respondents evaluated their level of English proficiency as independent and above (intermediate (32.4 %), upper-intermediate (35.1 %) and proficient (27 %)), which anticipated good results in the completion the questionnaire tasks.

Indeed, some of the questions gave little trouble to the respondents. They are as follows:

- Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “По газону не ходить” (*lit.* Don’t walk on the lawn; *Eng.* Keep off the grass) into English;
- Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “От себя/На себя” (*lit.* From yourself/To yourself; *Eng.* Push/Pull) into English;
- Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Счастливого пути!” (*lit.* Happy way!; *Eng.* Have a good trip!) into English.

The respondents selected the correct counterpart with ease which might be explained by the fact that they could have frequently encountered these phrases in real life. For example, in Russia you can often see a ‘Push/Pull’ sign on a café or hotel door, especially in tourist places.

Now let us proceed to analyzing the answers to the questions which were particularly challenging for the respondents.

About 60% of respondents made a mistake (see Chart 1, 2 and 3) when choosing the best translation for the following pragmatemes:

- “Осторожно, окрашено” (*lit.* Be careful, painted; *Eng.* Wet paint);
- “Срок годности” (*lit.* Term of validity; *Eng.* Best before);
- “Передаю ему/ей трубку” (*lit.* Give him/her the handset; *Eng.* I’ll put him/her on).

The examples show that accurate counterparts of the Russian pragmatemes in the English language are not their equivalents; they are analogues because — despite being semantically identical — they have differences in their syntactic structure *and* componential composition.

For example:

Окрашено (<i>lit.</i> Painted)	wet paint
<i>an elliptical sentence</i>	<i>A word combination</i>

If differences either in syntactic structure or componential composition were minimal, we would say that inter-language counterparts were partial equivalents. For example:

<u>Ушел на обед</u> (<i>lit.</i> Gone to lunch)	Out to lunch
<i>an elliptical sentence</i>	<i>an elliptical sentence</i>

If there were no differences at all, inter-language counterparts would be named full (or complete) equivalents. For example:

Счет, пожалуйста! (<i>lit.</i> [the] bill, please)	The bill, please
<i>a sentence</i>	<i>a sentence</i>

The terminology given is based on the classification of phraseological counterparts suggested by E. F. Arsentyeva [Arsentyeva, 1989]; however, it fits the analysis of pragmateme translation as pragmatemes just as phraseological units are set expressions.

Let us come back to the analysis of the respondents' translations of the pragmatemes (see Chart 1, 2).

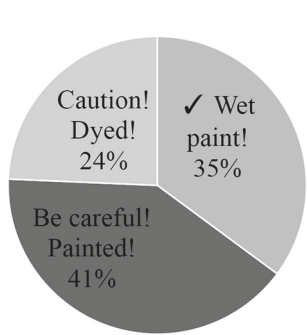


Chart 1. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Осторожно, окрашено” into English”

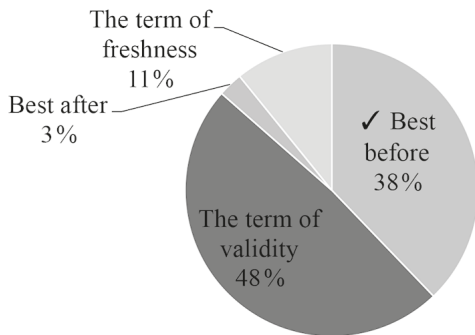


Chart 2. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Срок годности” into English”

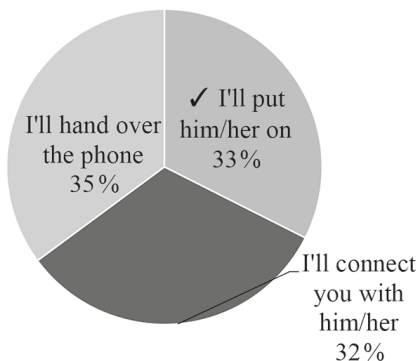


Chart 3. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Передаю ему/ей трубку” into English”

We observe that students employ calque or loan-translation and, as S. I. Vlakhov and S. P. Florin once coined, *‘slavishly copy’* the structure and componential composition of the source pragmateme in the target language [Vlakhov, Florin, 2009].

Chart 3 demonstrates that 35% of the respondents used a false literal translation (“I’ll hand over the phone to him/her”) while 32% selected

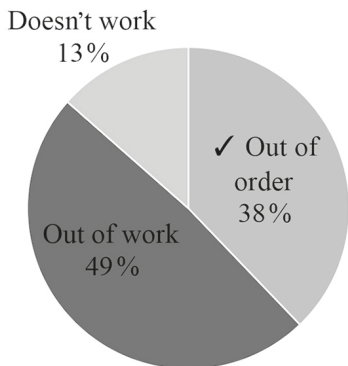


Chart 4. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “He работаer” into English”

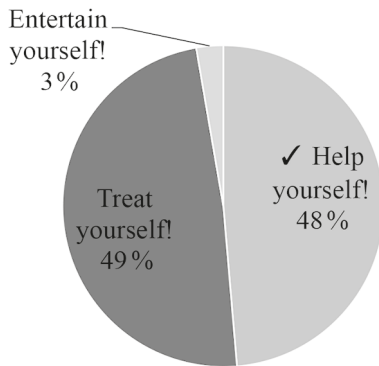


Chart 5. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Угощайся!” into English”

a pragmateme which resembled a Russian phrase with similar, still not identical, meaning (*Rus.* “Соединяю вас [с...]”; *lit.* Connect you [to...]) (see Chart 3).

Approximately 50% of the respondents mistranslated the following pragmatemes (see Chart 4 and Chart 5):

- “He работаer” (*lit.* Doesn't work; *Eng.* Out of order);
- “Угощайся!” (*lit.* Treat yourself!; *Eng.* Help yourself!).

When choosing the best translation of the phrase “He работаer” into English (*lit.* Doesn't work; *Eng.* Out of order), 49% of the respondents selected the incorrect option “out of work”. If such a counterpart was used in a real-life situation, communication will fail because the phrase “out of work” has a completely different meaning — being without a paid job.

In Chart 5 we see a sample of literal translation again. Almost half of the respondents (49%) are under ‘hypnosis’ of the component *treat* (*Rus.* угощать); therefore, they opt for the erroneous counterpart “Treat yourself”.

Some of the questions in our questionnaire suggested several correct answers. For instance, the students were asked to choose the best translation of the Russian phrases “Вход только для персонала” (*lit.* Entrance is for personnel only) and “Линия занята” (*lit.* Line is busy) (see Charts 6 and 7).

As regards the pragmateme “Вход только для персонала”, it means that entrance is for staff/employees/personnel only. We may assume that the majority of the respondents (64%) chose the correct English counterpart “Staff only” as they have encountered this variant of translation in real life or in cinematography. We suppose that the phrase “No trespass-

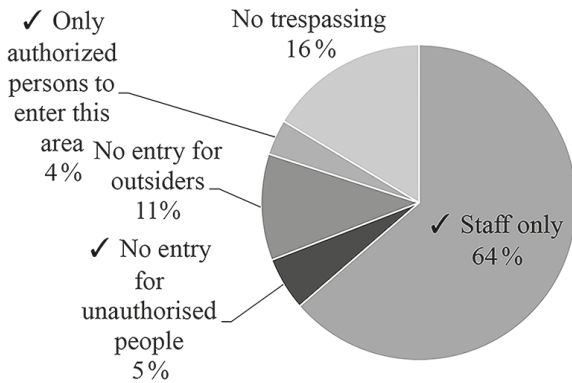


Chart 6. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Вход только для персонала” into English”

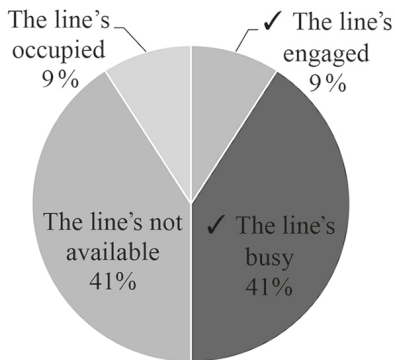


Chart 7. Answers to the question “Choose the best translation of the Russian phrase “Линия занята” into English”

ing” is quite familiar to the respondents for the same reason. However, semantically it has little connection with the pragmateme “Staff only”. This pragmateme is used on signs to warn people not to enter a place or area because it is somebody’s property. In addition, we notice the influence of interference when some of the respondents (11 %) chose the calque-translation “No entry for outsiders” because in Russia it is much more likely to be seen on signs which run as follows: “Посторонним вход воспрещен” (*lit.* Entrance is forbidden to outsiders).

Chart 7 shows that almost half of the respondents (41 %) mixed up two pragmatemes — “The line is busy” and “The number is unavailable”. We may suppose that it happened due to the fact that they often hear the phrase

“The number is unavailable” in real life during a call. As for the phrase “The line is busy”, it is not pronounced. Callers hear an audible signal instead, the beep-beep-beep tone. 9% of the respondents selected the incorrect literal translation (“The line is occupied”). The same percentage of the respondents selected the correct counterpart “The line is engaged” which, actually, has a regional marker ‘British English’ in dictionaries [Cambridge].

Thus, it can be concluded that the respondents are usually unaware of synonymic pragmatemes, whereas the knowledge of synonymic variants is of great importance. Occasionally, different *locations* require the use of one or another synonym (as in the examples of “No trespassing” and “Authorized personnel only”). In other cases, *situations* require the use of a particular synonym. For example, the phrase “Excuse me” can be used both when apologizing and when drawing attention, while the phrase “I’m sorry” is used only for expressing an apology.

Our questionnaire also included questions asking the respondents to choose the most stylistically appropriate translation of pragmatemes (see Chart 8).

When the respondents were asked to choose the most polite response to the words of gratitude, the majority (70%) selected “You’re welcome!” as it is, indeed, a very common reaction to the words of gratitude. However, there is another option which is correct — “It’s my pleasure!”. According to the dictionary [Britannica], “My pleasure” is similar to “You’re welcome”, but more polite and more emphatic. We suppose that the respondents are confident in using a more common pragmeteme “You’re welcome”; therefore, they selected it as being the most polite one.

Chart 8 lets us conclude that the students are not always aware of the communicative register of different expressions, which can also hinder effective communication.

We insist that for effective communication in a foreign language, it is necessary to have certain sociolinguistic competencies, including knowledge of pragmatemes. By sociolinguistic competence, following M. Meyerhoff, we mean “skills and resources speakers need to deploy in order to be competent members of a speech community using language, not only lexically and grammatically but socially appropriately, i. e. suitably

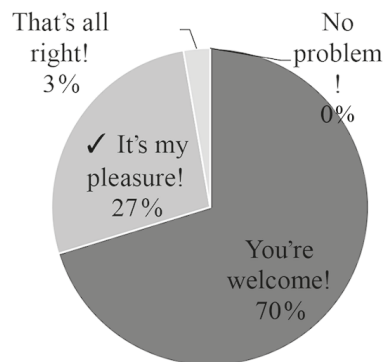


Chart 8. Answers to the question “Which is the most polite response to the words of gratitude?”

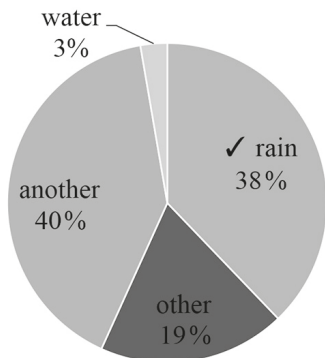


Chart 9. Answers to the question “Fill in the gap in the English phrase which is used to politely refuse a meeting: “_____ check”

in different contexts or with different interlocutors” [Meyerhoff, 2006, p. 96].

In the third type of questions we asked the respondents to fill the gaps in pragmetemes. The case of the English pragmeteme “raincheck” is of particular interest in this regard. The phrase means ‘another time’. When choosing the right answer, 62 % of respondents made a mistake. To answer this question correctly it was necessary to be acquainted with the cultural and historical context. Initially, ‘a raincheck’ was a ticket that allowed you to see an event (usually baseball) at a different time if it was cancelled because of rain. Nowadays, this expression is used when it is not possible to accept an invitation to a

concert, performance, etc., but there is a desire to attend it another time [Cambridge].

Chart 9 indicates the respondents’ limited cultural background which did not allow many of them to select the correct answer (see Chart 9).

After the survey, some of the students volunteered to share their impressions and thoughts about their knowledge of pragmetemes with the researchers. On the whole, the students were surprised by their questionnaire results, because it turned out that they “*have been learning English for so long, but they do not know so much, although at first glance these phrases are elementary things*”.

We believe that insufficient time is devoted to teaching pragmetemes. If a student is surrounded by a natural language and cultural environment, his/her acquaintance with pragmetemes takes place ‘unconsciously’, i. e. a person, studying a foreign language, does not make much effort to learn them by heart. Being in an artificial bilingual environment, a student needs special learning strategies to acquire these seemingly easy phrases [Ovchinnikova, 2008]. Moreover, we should keep in mind that the respondents were not simultaneous, but sequential bilinguals.

Conclusions

In general, the results of the research indicate that in the situation of artificial educational bilingualism pragmetemes pose an obstacle in the way of students. They find it challenging to choose an adequate translation

of pragmatemes and recognize their semantic, stylistic and semantic-stylistic features. Students fall victim to both purely linguistic and linguistic-cultural interference. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to the study of pragmatemes and develop learners' sociolinguistic and cultural competence.

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