

LINGUISTIC UNIVERSALS WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF NEOPRAGMATISM

Pragmatics at large is a subfield of linguistics which deals with “the study of what words mean in particular situations” /Merriam-Webster dictionary, 2006/. A question might arise as what neopragmatism is. The word obviously encompasses the Greek prefix *neo-* as *new*. Hence the rough translation of this subfield of linguistics is *new pragmatics*. However, it is essential to understand why a new term has been coined since all branches and fields of any given science do develop and evolve, yet each of them does not come up with a renewed name for an already existing branch. As Biletzki has put it, “My working assumption is that ‘new’ theories of language may have roots in the past, and, furthermore, that the merit of these theories can be, in part, checked by such philosophical roots” /Biletzki, 1996/. Thus, there should have been a radical change for linguists to come up with the notion of neopragmatism. Schwartz and Campbell state that “neopragmatism is distinguished from pragmatism in that it highlights the role that language plays in the construction of truth” /Swartz, Campbell, Pestana, 2009/. According to the acknowledged principles of pragmatism, truth is made and not discovered.

Pragmatics was first developed in the late 1970s. Schwartz and Campbell describe it as a “U.S anti-foundationalist philosophical tradition” /Swartz, Campbell, Pestana, 2009/. Neopragmatism, which is also called linguistic pragmatism, was not developed much later on, being a product of the 1980s. So, obviously, it is not time which separates them most, although pragmatic ideas do find their roots in the philosophical movements of the late 19th century. Most importantly, neopragmatism repudiates the notion of universal truth, epistemological foundationalism, representationalism, and the notion of epistemic objectivity.

In this very sense neopragmatism is strongly connected with the concept of linguistic universals.

In the first place, linguistic universals in the broadest sense are

defined as linguistic features virtually true for all languages. It should be mentioned that, although there is no one opinion or survey indicating the exact number of the world languages alive today, their number is roughly estimated 6,000-7,000 by some researchers only pointing out the precise number of 7,105 /<http://www.ethnologue.com/world/>. Whatever the exact number of languages is (if such is possible to establish), it is strikingly difficult to highlight any universal features that such a great number of languages might share. Furthermore, it seems that neopragmatism rejects the very notion that it might be possible. For our research we are primarily concerned whether the notion of absolute linguistic universals is not nonsensical. This is exactly where the connection between neopragmatism and linguistic universals shows up. The most fundamental question which should be asked for the investigation into the bonds between neopragmatism and linguistic universals is whether there can be such a universal truth (in our case, feature) which can refer to almost all languages.

To take an example, one could assume that all the languages of the world are bound to have the same parts of speech. This would be somewhat naïve for the simple reason that it is a well-established linguistic fact that they do not. A vivid example is that some languages lack prepositions as parts of speech being highly agglutinative, e.g. Hungarian and Turkish /http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Agglutinative_language.html/. This does mean that theoretically were one language to repudiate the feature shared by all others, it would be rejected as a non-universal characteristic. Again, with this we are back to the most basic question whether such a thing is possible.

This was merely a random example. The linguistic hierarchy allows room for a more detailed investigation, i.e. a thorough exploration at the levels of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. We will conditionally name neopragmatics as the seventh one.

To start with, on phonetic level the sounds of the human speech are studied. To repudiate the notion that there are sounds typical to all languages of the world, one might have a look at Vietnamese which uses triphthongs not typical to many other languages. There are also languages

which lack some sounds like Dumu spoken in Papua New Guinea which possesses no velar consonants /<http://wals.info/chapter/18/>.

On the lexical level, it should be noted that some languages lack what is supposed to be a quite common word in others. For instance, the fact that the English possesses no equivalent to the French word *retrouvailles*: The happiness of meeting again after a long time, means this word cannot be part of the universal language vocabulary if it exists/<http://www.wordsoverpixels.com/retrouvailles-the-happiness-of-meeting-again-after/>. One might argue that this is related to the linguistic concept of untranslatable words. In this context linguistic universals have tight bonds with such a pragmatic (and, hence, neopragmatic) issue as translation.

On the grammatical level we, speakers of chiefly Indo-European languages, suppose that there should be some accord between the number of the objects and their designation, as in *three books*. However, not even all Indo-European languages show this quality with the Armenian translation being *three book* (*երեք գիրք*), i.e. in Armenian we do not put the noun in plural if it is used alongside with a numeral. In other words, the noun phrase expresses plurality via numerals if such exist, as opposed to many other Indo-European languages, such as French, English, Spanish, etc.

So, not only are linguistic universals difficult to establish for all languages at large, but they are also bound to language differences within one and the same language family. What neopragmatism teaches us is that there is no one universal truth. In this very meaning it opposes the English usage of the definite article with the word *truth*, as in *the truth*. This does not suggest that there are no linguistic universals possible, but rather that finding them might take long years, whereas rejecting any feature as universal will be possible merely by finding one exception. This serves as the main rationale behind choosing to say relative *linguistic universals*, instead of *absolute linguistic universals*. Again, neopragmatism comes up with another question: How can virtually all languages be investigated into if some of them have no writing system and are thus not fully represented? Does it mean that any attempt to find them out is bound to be a failure? Not at all. We suggest that such a fundamental work should be carried out carefully and in great detail.

Moreover, we believe that only a team of well-prepared linguists is capable of finding an answer to the question whether absolute linguistic universals might exist. Nonetheless, this is the pragmatic aspect of linguistic universals; on a higher, theoretical level, we are interested in merely the question whether such a thing exists.

The importance of linguistic universals cannot be diminished. Pragmatically, they are opening the doors to an extra-linguistic reality expressed by linguistic realia. Pragmatic philosophy is thought to reject “moral claims on absolute or transcendental principles” /Eugene, 1999/. Neopragmatism, on the contrary, centers around “the uses and resources of language” /Eugene, 1999/.

Linguistic universals are also vital in terms of such a pragmatic (and, thus neopragmatic for neopragmatics has more or less the same scope of investigation) aspect, as translation is. It is linguistic universals that enable the establishment of parallel corresponding features in two or more languages, be they phonemic, lexical, syntactic, semantic or pragmatic. They also serve as the grounds for compiling dictionaries, as well as textbooks for language learners. Linguistic universals are universal by the very scope of investigation. Since every level of language analysis may be represented by this or that feature inherent to this or that language, this concept spreads far beyond the scope of the analysis of pragmatics and neopragmatism. Furthermore, not only is it a notion that transcends into all linguistic aspects horizontally, but it also incorporates an in-depth linguistic investigation for the answer to the fundamental question concerning linguistic universals, i.e. whether absolute linguistic universals are possible in theory, is likely to answer many other burning questions of the linguistic world. Among them, the issue on whether protolanguage exists; whether translation and interpretation may be logically comprehended and, thus, computerized or digitalized; whether the notion of untranslatableness is justified; to what extent our linguistic and extra-linguistic perception of the world may differ from language to language, and, hence, from culture to culture.

With all this said, the author does not believe that there is a single answer to the abovementioned questions. Linguistic universals studied at the level of pragmatics and neopragmatism may just hint at the ways in

which linguistics can develop further on by explaining and exemplifying how languages function both at theoretical and practical levels.

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Ծ. ՄԵԼԻՔ-ԱԴԱՄՅԱՆ – Լեզվաբանական ընդհանրությունները մեռալրագմաթիկա հասկացության շրջանակներում. – Հոդվածը ուսումնասիրում է լեզվաբանական ընդհանրությունների (ունիվերսալիաների) կապը լեզվաբանության մեռալրագմաթիկա ոլորտի հետ: Այն մասն արծարծում է՝ պրագմաթիկայի և մեռալրագմաթիկայի տարբերությունները մույն՝ լեզվաբանական ընդհանրությունների համատեքստում: Լեզվաբանական ընդհանրությունների ուսումնասիրությունը թույլ կտա պատասխանել լեզվաբանության տարբեր ճյուղերի մի շարք հարցերի՝ ի թիվս թարգմանչական, համեմատական լեզվաբանական և սույն հոդվածի համար առանցքային գործաբանական հարցերի:

Ш. МЕЛИК-АДАМЯН – *Лингвистические универсалии в рамках понятия неопрагматизма.* – В статье рассматриваются вопросы различия прагматики и неопрагматизма в контексте лингвистических универсалий. Изучение лингвистических универсалий позволяет найти ответы на ряд вопросов прагматической лингвистики – переводческих, сравнительно-лингвистических и, что принципиально важно для данной статьи, прагматических и неопрагматических.