EXPRESSING ATTITUDE AND EVALUATION THROUGH INTENSIFIERS EXAMINED THROUGH THE PRISM OF SEMANTIC PROSODY

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Abstract: Intensifiers are widely known for their capacity not only to 'intensify' the item they modify but for their ability to express attitude and evaluation. It is, namely, this latter quality that attracts the attention of the current paper. As the evaluative characterof such items isusually not immediately accessible and speaker's intuition is unreliable, the studyexamines the problem from the prism of semantic prosody. In order to present a full picture of the problem two groups of synonymous adverbs of degree are considered. One of them consists of reinforcing items and the other one is formed by attenuators. Since semantic prosody is important not only for language learners but for translators as well, the study aims to make a parallel between the English intensifiersand their Bulgarian counterparts. Thusproviding information for the existing similarities and differences between the items in the two languages. What motivatesthe examination of semantic prosody from a cross-linguistic perspective, besides its cruciality for the above-mentioned groups, is the fact that despite the number of studies paying attention to it, none of them comparesEnglish and Bulgarian linguistic items and there are not many focused on English intensifierseither.

The study benefits from two corpora of considerable size, the British National Corpus and the Bulgarian National Corpus.The procedure followed in it consists inthe analysis of the first 500 examples of a given collocation which is composed ofthe chosen degree adverb and theadjectiveit modifies. The choice of the study to concentrate on adjectives, instead of paying attention to verbs, adverbs, andadjectives, was prompted by the need to limit the scope of the study, thus providing a realistic opportunity to examine the items from a cross-linguistic perspective. The procedure reflects and takes into consideration the specific features of the Bulgarian National Corpus. Unlike the BNC, it does notprovideany systematicoverview of the searchresults, i.e. the collocations are not arranged in alphabetical order and there is no data for higherfrequencycollocations.

The analysis proves that, as expected,the semantic prosodies of the examined synonyms are not identical and though dictionaries treat them as interchangeable these items are certainly not. It demonstrates that even though English and Bulgarian are two distinctly different languages the semantic prosody of the examined near synonymous items is very similar in both languages. It also proves the crucial importance of semantic prosody for the full understanding of lexical meanings,thus the information it supplies lowers the chance for inappropriate word choices made both by language learners and translators.

Keywords: semantic prosody, intensifier, near synonymous items.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Partington, Duguid, and Taylor evaluation is pervasive in practically all forms of linguistic communication as very few discourses are purely ideational and in all normal circumstances speakers/writers give their own evaluative attitude to it, approving or critical. On many occasions the evaluative attitude is in fact the core information communicated (2013 p.44). Stubbs believes that "the whole point of an utterance may be to express the speaker's attitude, evaluation and point of view" (2001 p.198). Though 'signalling evaluations both explicitly and implicitly, can be used to direct, control and even manipulate the behaviour of others, generally to the advantage of the individual performing the evaluation' (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor, 2013, p.46), 'readers and listeners normally have no trouble at all interpreting the communicative intent' (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor, 2013, p.46). But the evaluative polarity of some items is not immediately accessible. Such is the case with many intensifiers (*pretty, totally, almost*, etc.) whose semantic prosody is rarely discussed (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor, 2013, p.51) despite the fact thatthey are explicit signals of the position and attitude of the author, i.e. expressions directly proposing the author's stance (Paradis, 1997; Peneva, 2014).

Though, it is often considered that the perlocutionary evaluative effect of intensifiers is entirely dependent on the readers' individual mindset Partington, Duguid and Taylor postulate that the matter to be intensified should be invariably marked for positivity and negativity (2013,p.51). This naturally leads to the assumption that despite the predominating idiosyncratic preferences there should be an overall leading tendency determining the intensified content (2013,p.51).As a result of this it would be especially interesting to discuss and decipher the communicative intent of the author through the phenomenon of semantic prosody, whose primary function is also described by Louw as 'to express speaker/writer attitude or evaluation (2000, p.58).

Though semantic prosody has become the centre of numerous studies in the recent years (Partington, 1998; Sinclair, 1991, 1998; Stubbs, 1996, 2002; Francis &Hunston, 2002;Begagić, 2013, 2018; Fuqua, 2014; Hu, 2015;Prihantoro, 2015) and some even covering issues in two or more languages (Partington, 1998;Berber-Sardinha, 2000;Tognini-Bonelli, 2001;Xiao & McEnery, 2006), there are rare cases of studies dealing with the semantic prosody of intensifiers, no evidence of papers contrasting the semantic prosody of near synonyms in English and Bulgarian. As the concept of semantic prosody is relevant both for language students and translators (Partington, 1998, p.23-25; Hoey, 2000) we believe that the results from the current study can be beneficial for these groups, fostering thefull understanding of the lexical meanings of intensifiers, thus,lowering the chance for inappropriate word choices.

2. INTENSIFICATION AND SEMANTIC PROSODY HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Intensifiers have been the object of study for many years, they have received various denominations and aregenerally divided into two groups – lexical items strengthening the meaning of the item they modify (reinforcers) and items weakeningit (attenuators) (Stoffel, 1901; Quirk et al, 1985, p.445; Allerton, 1987, p.18, Halliday, 2004, p.356; Paradis, 1997,p.15). The current article adopts the term intensifier after Allerton's classification despite the somewhat double nature of this concept, implying reinforcement and at the same time including lexemes with an attenuating character. As it was mentioned above, this group of adverbs "showinvolvement"(Paradis,1997, p.10)and act as "conveyorsofspeakerattitudes" (Paradis,1997, p.13). But despite the fact that theevaluative polarity of these items is not immediately accessible(Partington, Duguid & Taylor, 2013,p.51) their semantic prosody is rarely discussed. Thus 'the consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates' as Louw labels it (1993,p.157) is left unexplored causing difficulties for unexperienced language learners who often experience difficulties deciphering the message in the text.

The idea that words imbue its neighbouring items with certain meaning is not new and dates at least to the end of the 19th century whereBréal (1897) referred to it as transference of meaning which is the product of habitual collocation as 'contagion'. According to Hunston and Francis 'a word may be said to have a particular semantic prosody, if it can be shown to co-occur typically with other words that belong to a particular semantic set' (2002,p.137). Partington considers this 'the spreading of connotational colouring beyond the single word boundaries' (1998, p.68). But 'perhaps one of the most obvious consequences of the extension of the unit of meaning is that words which are co-selected do not maintain their independence. If a word is regularly used in contexts of good news or bad news or judgement, for example, it carries this kind of meaning around with it' (see Tognini-Bonelli, 2001,p.111). The fact that words do not carry only their meaning but also the connotation of the items they collocate with is important for the overall idea of the message and is also deemed an essential skill for the successful communication among non-native speakers and thus in translation (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Xiao & McEnery, 2006). This is especially valuable in the case where near synonyms are used (Xiao & McEnery, 2006).

Based on this, the paper has the opportunity to investigate collocational behaviour and semantic prosody of English and Bulgarian near synonyms and close translation equivalents. Which, in the light of the previous research on the topic, may also be defined as revealing 'the appropriacy of (so-called) equivalent items' (Berber-Sardinha, 2000,p.95) or as testing the value of 'cognate, or 'look-alike' words through semantic prosody as such items can have very different semantic prosodies in two related languages (Partington, 1998,p.77).

3. METHODS AND AIMS

The centrepiece of the research is formed bythe category of intensifiers in their capacity to modify adjectives[22] which usually show the text producer's attitude towards a certain subject (Paradis, 1997). As it was suggested, though, there is a certain difficulty in determining the exact evaluative power of intensifiers (Partington, Duguid &Taylor, 2013, p.51). Thus, it can be accessed through prosodies which express, as Louw describes it, "the speaker's real attitude even where (s)he is at pains to conceal it". This lack of control over the choice of vocabulary suggests, according to Tognini-Bonelli (2001, p.112) that semantic prosodies operate mainly subliminally and are not readily accessible on intuitive level (Louw, 1993; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001,p.112; Xiao & McEnery, 2006). Following to this, the present study requires the use of corpora, and for the purposes of the current study at least two corpora are needed to unveil the colouring of the lexemes in question.

Despite the declaration of some scientists (Wachter, 2012) that analysing large corpora is not pivotal for the reliability of the results, especially when specific registers are considered, it is indisputable that the size of the corpora is of crucial importance when the outcomes of the study should give information about more general

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[22] The choice of adjectives as modified items was motivated by the need to limit the study. Thus, providing a chance to discuss collocations which are as similar as possible in both languages and to analyse their semantic prosody.

language traits. Due to this, the study takes advantage of two large corpora: the British National Corpus (BNC) and the only one available for Bulgarian –the Bulgarian National Corpus (BulNC). Though the BulNC is categorised as a tool which can be employed for theoretical studies in various spheres of linguistics (see http://dcl.bas.bg/bulnc/) it has serious limitations as it comes to statistical methods which can be used in its exploration. As a result, the methodology used in the study reflects these restrictions. Thus, the analysed material consists of the first 500 search results of the selected intensifier modifying random adjectives. In order to further limit the scope of the research two specific groups of near synonyms in English and Bulgarian are examined. The first group is the group of reinforcers, formed by *absolutely, completely,* and *totally,*as well as their Bulgarian counterparts *абсолютно (absolyutno), напълно (napalno), съвсем (savsem).* While the second group represents attenuators – *quite, rather,* and *fairly* and the Bulgarian *доста (dosta), твърде (tvarde),*and *относително (otnositelno).* The groups took shape after consultation with the Oxford Dictionary and the Bulgarian WordNet (BulNet).Based on the limitations and the opportunities, provided by these two corpora, the study relies on two methods to gather information about the semantic prosodies of the examined intensifiersand aims to determine whether there is an overlap in the prosodiesof the English near synonyms and their Bulgarian counterparts.

And as the semantic prosody of lexical items depends on the company they keep (Firth,1957) the study analyses the words surrounding the intensifiers. The first method tests specific 'felicity conditions' (Wachter, 2012,p.23) and isdescribed with the lexical presupposition of certain verbs of judgment that must be satisfied in order for an utterance to felicitous (Wachter, 2012,p.23). Twophrasesare used: *accused of/blamed for being,* whichrequires a negative or unfavourable proposition, and *praised for/applauded for being*, which presupposes positive adjective. She expounds that 'these lexical prepositions can relate to semantic prosody because these verbs require certain propositions with a negative or positive value (Wachter, 2012,p.24-26). In order to achieve reciprocity of the results, the tests applied for the Bulgarian section of the study are identical to abovementioned ones while the phrases are substituted for their Bulgarian counterparts *обвинявам/набеждавамзатова, че е* and *хваля/аплодирамзатова, че е*.Following Wachter, if an adjective fails both tests, it should be coded for neutral prosody (Wachter, 2012,p.26). As the test is considered not entirely trustworthy according to Louw (1993, 2000), Stubbs (1996, 2001), and Xiao and McEnery (2006) who elaborate that research of semantic prosody must entail collocation analysis and should not rely entirely on the inherent meaning of the lexeme, the study examines the span of 10 words to left and 10 words to the right of each intensifier to analyse its prosody.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

As established by Xiao and McEnery (2006, p.108), previous research on collocation and semantic prosody is focused primarily on English while other languages and contrastive studies have largely been overlooked. This statement is perfectly valid for Bulgarian. Thus, the present study seeks to address the problem and aims to make a comparison between the collocational behaviour of near synonyms and their semantic prosodies in English and Bulgarian. Until now the focus of the above-mentioned comparative studies was placed on the exploration of the semantic prosody of verbs (Sinclair, 1991; Louw, 2000; Stubbs, 1995; Xiao & McEnery, 2006) and nouns (Partington, 1998).And though there are studies discussing the prosody of intensifiers (Partington, Duguid & Taylor, 2013, p.51), there is none which examines Bulgarian adverbs of degree. The focus here will be placed on intensifiers acting as modifiers of adjectives. This choice has been motivated by previous studies which prove that the phenomenon of intensification exists in both languages but provide no information whetherthere aresimilarities and differences in the collocational behaviour and semantic prosody of the items usually considered as counterparts.

The intensifiers selected for the purposes of this analysis are 12. Half of them are English (*absolutely*, *completely*, *totally*, *quite*, *rather*, and *fairly*) and the other half consists of their Bulgarian counterparts (*абсолютно*, *напълно*, *съвсем*, *доста*, *твърде*, and*относително*). Each group is also divided into two groups – reinforers, the first three words, and attenuators,the latter three. The first step is to examine the collocational behaviour and semantic prosody of the English adverbs of degree and then compare the results with those for Bulgarian intensifiers.

5. REINFORCERS

Consisting of three synonyms(*absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally*), this group is a vivid exampleof near synonymy. The Oxford English Dictionary classifies *absolutely*as 'with no qualification, restriction, or limitation; totally' and 'used to emphasize a strong or exaggerated statement'. *Completely* and *totally* are among thefirst synonyms,offered by the dictionary. *Completely*does not have a definition in the Oxford English Dictionary but Cambridge Dictionary offers 'in every way or as much as possible' as the most appropriate. Its synonyms are *totally* and *utterly. Totally* is defined as 'completely; absolutely' in the OED. The abovementioned definitions and synonyms prove that the two dictionaries treat these three words as near synonyms. Even the examples, presented under the definitions in both

dictionaries, seem to strive for balance between negative and positive, thus it is difficult to extract information about the affective meanings these near synonyms have solely from their dictionary entries.

Despite this, theanalysis of the search results for the group of reinforcersreveals that, though *absolutely*, *completely*, and *totally* are considered near synonyms and may be perceived as interchangeable by FL students these items have different semantic prosodies. *Absolutely* shows a strong tendency towards positive semantic prosody 311 of all 500 examples, examined in the study, have positive meaning. Among the adjectives collocating with it are *brilliant, wonderful, marvellous, sure, essential, free, vital, fantastic,* etc. They are closely associated with positive emotions and feelings. Consider the example:

> it was an absolutely brilliant chef, really nice restaurant,

Only 170 of all examples have negative semantic prosody, which in some cases is due to negative particles and just19 of them have neutral prosody.

Completely displays a slightly more pronounced tendency towards negative semantic prosody, 266 of its examples have an unfavourable meaning and 218 of them are positive, only 16 of them can be defined as neutral. Some of the adjectives collocating with *completely* are *mad, wrong, empty, irrelevant, alone, independent,* etc., i.e. invoking unpleasant associations.

> completely wrong procedure. I, I can't understand the secretariat allowing this to come

Totally, on the other hand, shows almost full preference for the negative, 388 of the examined examples can be interpreted as having negative connotations. Most of the adjectives, modified by it, can also be described as having negative meaning – *wrong, unsuitable, blind, irrelevant, alien, false, devoid,* etc. Only 85 of the examples can be described as having positive meaning, and 27 of them have neutral prosody.

The analysis of the results displays the differences between these three near synonyms which turn to have different affective meanings thus rejecting the idea for interchangeability between these items. The items can be arranged into a symbolic cline starting with *absolutely,*which has clear preference for the positive.Followed by *completely*, which occupies the mid position, showing only slightest preference for the negative pole of the semantic continuum. The lowest position should be occupied by *totally,* which has clear predilection for the negative.

Interestingly enough, the collocational analysis and thetwo felicity conditions tests of the Bulgarian intensifiers, examined in the study, reveal roughly the same tendency. Though the numbers are different, the adverbs can still be positioned on a scale with *абсолютно*taking up the highest position, as it is associated mostly with favourable affective meaning. More than half of its examples, 261 of them, can be ranked as positive. The adjectives collocating with it are *пълноценен (palnotsenen) 'complete', перфектен (perfekten) 'perfect', здрав (zdrav) 'healthy',* etc.220 of the analysed examples can be graded as negative and 18 of them are seen as having neutral meaning.

> Вие сте абсолютно здрав и нормален човек, Робин. (You are an absolutely healthy and normal human, Robin.)

The second position is filled up by *напълно*which has almost the same tolerance for the negative as it has for the positive. As much as230 of the 500 examined examples can be deemed as positive and 216 as negative. The rest can be marked as neutral. *Съвсем* occupies the lowest step on the cline and is positioned closer to the negative pole of the semantic continuum. It has 265 negative examples and only 172 positive, the rest are considered neutral. The adjectives it collocates with are *сам (sam) 'alone', луд (lud) 'crazy', негоден (negoden) 'good-for-nothing'.* Due to this, it can be defined as having negative semantic prosody.

The final analysis of the two groups of reinforcers reveals that, as expected, the semantic prosodies of near synonyms are different both in English and in Bulgarian. But while English and Bulgarian are different the semantic prosodies of the discussed lexical items, marked as counterparts in the two languages, are the same.

6. ATTENUATORS

The second stage of the analysis discusses the semantic prosody of the attenuators, where the tendency is almost the same. The group of the English attenuators is formed by *quite, rather*, and *fairly*. The first member of the group – *quite*, is well known for its double nature and for its ability to act as reinforcing and attenuating item (Paradis, 1997; Quirk et al, 1985). The analysis of the examples, extracted from the BNC shows that *quite* has slight preference for the positive, i.e. it has positive semantic prosody – 267 of all 500 examples are marked as positive, while 213 have an unfavourable prosody, and 20 are neutral. *Quite* collocates with *impossible, difficult, wrong, sure,* and *good* but some of the sentences containing adjectives with positive connotation have negative particles as well, making their meaning negative. *Rather*, on the other hand, has distinctly negative affective meaning as 372 of its examples contained adjectives with unfavourable meaning or negative particles.

> I've had a rather difficult time of it of late and it may be affecting my attitude to

Fairly, though, is mostly found in positive environment – 278 of the extracted examples have favourable meaning and only 106 of them can be described as negative. Among the adjectives listed as its collocates are *easy, good, clear, stable, accurate,* etc.

> Well I'm sure it's something fairly easy.
> Once you know the basics it's fairly easy.

To summarise, just like reinforcing intensifiers, the group of attenuators can also be arranged on a scale according to their semantic prosody. The highest place, oriented towards the positive pole of the semantic continuum should be given to *fairly* which is mostly seen in favourable environment and has distinctly positive semantic prosody. The second place should be appointed to *quite* which collocates almost equally well with items with negative semantic prosody and such with positive one. The last position on the cline, which is situated closer to the negative pole of the semantic continuum is for *rather* which is habitually seen in negative company.

As with the group of reinforcers, the analysis of the Bulgarian attenuators proves that they follow roughly the same tendency and their semantic prosodies coincide with those of their English counterparts. The lexical item which can be categorised as having distinctive preference for positive semantic prosody is *относително.* 269 of its examples have positive meaning, while 201 of them have negative connotation. Among its collocates are adjectives like *безопасен (bezopasen) 'safe', чист (chist)'clear', спокоен (spoken)'calm'.* The adverb *доста*, though, is a bit more prone to negative affective meaning, than it is to positive. It has 287 examples which have negative meaning and only 200 which can be classified as positive. *Твърде,* on the other hand, shows clear preference for the negative semantic prosody. Most of its examples, 341 of them, are classified as negative and only 135 of them carry positive meaning while the rest are considered neutral.

7. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This study examines the semantic prosody of intensifiers, near synonyms, in English and Bulgarian. It shows that the semantic prosodies of near synonyms are not identical and as a result such items are not interchangeable in the texts. Despite this difference, the study demonstrates that the semantic prosodies of English intensifiers are identical to those of their Bulgarian counterparts. Finally, the current research proves that the analysis of semantic prosody is important for understanding of lexical meaning of intensifiers, thus it can be used by FL students and translators to prevent the use of inappropriate lexical items.

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