Review of Dániel Z. Kádár's Academic Doctoral Dissertation

Ritual and Language

Dániel Z. Kádár emphasizes the importance of the ritual perspective in the analyses of different pragmatic and metapragmatic interactions and does so through the meticulous analyses of rituals in different linguacultures but concentrating mostly on Chinese interaction rituals. This approach is a pioneering one as Kádár also referring to previous views and existing concepts sheds more light on how the conventional pragmatic analyses and findings can be altered by the new methodology of investigating rituals, the speech acts in the ritual frames, and their roles in interactions.

I must confess that I am not a pragmatician so for me reading this piece of work was very enlightening, and I learned much from the dissertation. Kádár has done extensive research in this field, and his collaboration with Edmondson and House is well-documented both in the book and in his list of publications.

The structure

The Table of contents is followed by the list of figures, tables and illustrations, a brief abstract of the work and a short bio of the author. In the Acknowledgements he enumerates the colleagues and students, who contributed to the book, and expresses his gratitude to the researchers at the Hungarian Research Centre for their support as well as to the grant provided by the National Excellence Programme of the National Research, Development and Innovation Office of Hungary.

The Forward is written by Juliane House, who explains the importance of "a clear vision of what 'ritual' involves from a linguist's point of view, and also how this phenomenon is realized in many different linguacultural contexts." (p. 11-12)

The dissertation is divided into three big parts. After the Introduction, in which the author lays down the objectives of the research, specifies the conventions and gives an outline of the contents, in Part I, in four chapters the foundation of the topic, i.e. interaction ritual and the ritual perspective, is elaborated with the general features of ritual. From Chapter 3 on, each chapter is written as a case study with all the required parts: and introduction, the background of the study, the analysis, and a conclusion. Each chapter ends with a subchapter of recommended readings with their relevance to the candidate's previous and current work and with quotes from other researchers on the analyzed topic. I find it absolutely useful for the reader, especially for students of pragmatics.

Part II (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) analyzes oral and written, pragmatically complex rituals, interactions in the Chinese linguaculture with the goal of introducing mimesis, (self-)display and liminality. Each chapter contains a case study, and the data were collected from the

candidate's and his students' own observations and from written corpora. Again, the structures of the chapters are transparent and logically built.

Part III raises methodological issues and demonstrates how the different approaches to analyses may refine the message of an interaction depending on the linguistic/pragmatic and metapragmatic goals by focusing on the three units of pragmatic analysis, including expressions, speech acts and discourse.

Chapter 12 is the conclusion of the whole work, in which the candidate summarizes all his findings and also shows the possible ways of further research in the topic.

The References contains about 300 items on 15 pages with about 25 self-references, which demonstrates the expertise and the long-time relationship of the author with the main topic of the book.

The work ends with the notes, which contain further detailed explanations to the relevant parts in the work.

The Body

Research into rituals is rooted in anthropology and sociology rather than linguistics. However, for a linguist it is essential to investigate how language can contribute to the understanding of the message of a ritual in different social groups and in the individual, and this should be observed through the rights and obligations holding for a particular context. The traditional pragmatic approach examines the different speech acts which are relevant in certain utterances. However, speech acts can be examined in complex contexts and at the discourse level as well introducing new methodological ways for the analysis. This is what the author emphasizes all through his book.

In the study of rituals, there are three key units, as Kádár puts it in his Introduction, i.e. expressions, speech acts and discourse, and ritual research sheds light on the relationship between language, context, and morality. Referring to Goffman's view on social ritual (p. 28), he explains why viewing many instances of interaction as forms of ritual is important. The ritual perspective in pragmatics helps us understand that e.g. linguistic politeness or impoliteness can be misleading without context and background (see example 2.4 on p. 34). In other words, we need a ritual frame, which is a precondition for ritual to occur.

The related operation and presence of mimesis, (self-)display, escalation and liminality are also fundamental features of ritual. Cross-cultural study of the ritual perspective is important as there are elements that are normative for one ethnic group but menacing for other groups, which may lead to racist stereotypes and prejudices. An excellent analysis of the example of the anti-structural aggression escalated between an Irish and a Russian fighter in an MMA event, the reports on the match, the comments by the members of the communitas on websites, the post-event news interviews with the fighters and the comments about the interviews show how ambiguous the judgement of such cases can be. On the other hand,

examining politeness from a Chinese written discourse perspective with the ritual perspective, it is easy to realize that Chinese public announcements heavily loaded with polite language use represent social protocols rather than politeness. They have strongly conventionalized features and a fixed ritual frame with clear ritual rights and obligations, so they have little to do with interpersonal politeness but are parts of a public ritual.

The case study on the Chinese public announcements in Chapter 4 shows that these announcements follow a bipartite ritual structure: (i) polite social protocols, which bear no politeness in the interpersonal sense, and (ii) further implicit attempt to trigger the public's alignment with the leadership. The analysis is done on texts at the national and provincial levels, and the results have shown that the intensity of social protocoling in these announcements correlates with the administrative level.

The next chapter analyzes performative mimesis, which is not limited to certain phases of interaction but is present over entire interaction ritual events and can become normative in institutional ritual settings. In this case, the participants' normal status and behavior are changed, and this change triggers performative mimesis to create an illusion. In the case study, aggressive mimetic behavior in Chinese university 'military trainings' performed by student 'officers' is examined. These trainings are archetypical anti-structural rites of passage as they are liminal events that transform the status of the participants. Expressions used in such situations are described as Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (RFIEs), the concept of which is discussed in more detail in Part III of the book. These expressions indicate the realization of a speech act, e.g. Requests. As opposed to the interpersonal sense, in this study, expressions and speech acts related to impoliteness or rudeness do not serve as an offence but rather as a reinforcement of rights and obligations in the related ritual frame of the interaction.

Another distinctive feature of complex interaction rituals, '(self-)display' is discussed in Chapter 6, where the aim of the author is to display the possibility of distinguishing between various degrees of this feature in a more complex case study. The chapter investigates a corpus of 19th century historical Chinese letters written to ordinary recipients and to intellectual friends with a contrastive pragmatic take. There is a higher degree of self-displaying behavior in the latter sub-corpus. Competitive contexts are more apt to trigger such behavior.

Liminality is the last feature discussed in Part II of the book. It strongly correlates with an underlying sense of moral order and has a significant impact on the participants, who need to formulate the ritual by following what they believe is acceptable in the frame of the ritual. This chapter's case study deals with 'inappropriate' workplace dismissals and subsequent metapragmatic behavior reflecting evaluations. The author, based on the observation in his pilot study, comes to conclusion that in unambiguously inappropriate dismissal the legal order gets violated, while in pragmatically ambiguous ones only the moral order is trespassed. Liminality represents a typically structural ritual, in which a default moral order underlies any liminal ritual. The importance of the discussion of the three main characteristic features of interactionally and relationally complex rituals is in their influence on our daily lives, as the author states it.

Part III focuses on how one can study interaction in two major methodological routes: (i) ritual as a form, and (ii) ritual as a context and frame. In Chapter 8, two linguacultures (English and Chinese) are compared based on the expressions of the speech act Apologize in two corpora of comparable size and comprehensiveness: (i) Balanced Chinese Corpus and (ii) British National Corpus. The quantitative analysis shows that the expression 'sorry' is more frequent in dyadic settings in English than in the Chinese dataset, which indicates that in the English linguaculture it may have a comparably weaker relationship to ritual than in the Chinese one. Here, in this chapter the author proposes a framework for the ritual study of pragmatically important expressions, which are called RFIEs, and which have already been mentioned and analyzed in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 9, the author as a methodological take 1-B demonstrates how the relationship between speech acts and ritual can be studied in a replicable way by examining ancient Chinese admonishing under the illocutionary category of Suggest. Admonishing is a complex ritual worth investigating as the ritual frame triggers paradoxical pragmatic behavior as in ancient linguacultures, the recipient was more highly ranked than the admonisher himself. The data analyzed in this chapter are from the ancient period of Classic Chinese (before 2nd century BC).

Chapters 10 and 11 discuss "how the second methodological take on ritual can be put to practice. Complex ritual phenomena can be studied from a pragmatic angle in a replicable way if one attempts to interpret them through replicable pragmatic units of analysis." (p. 154) For this, self-denigration as an essential ritual phenomenon, which tends to ritually reinforce or define the rights and obligations holding for a particular context, is analyzed in Chinese historical novels from different ages. The first two novels represent historical language use, while the third one being a modern novel just imitates the style of historical novels, and so it features many traditional manifestations of self-denigration. While this chapter focuses on the phases of an interaction, speech acts and expressions, Chapter 11 concentrates on the discourse analytic approach and investigates the interactional units of bargaining in Chinese markets, after the introduction of the extended analytical model of the author.

In the final chapter, the author provides short synopses of the chapters of the book and highlights the strength of the ritual perspective. He explains that ritual is so much present in our everyday language use that we do not even notice that we interact in a ritual frame. He calls for a contrastive take in pragmatic research comparing culturally embedded historical ritual data. He also suggests putting more emphasis on second language pragmatics and calls for research into the role of pragmatic competence in ritual language use in foreign language learning.

The candidate successfully follows a bottom-up and corpus-based view, which he considers fundamental in concentrating on the language/pragmatic perspectives of ritual as his main aim is to present a replicable pragmatic framework of ritual language use.

Language and style

Throughout the dissertation the language use is consistently precise, which enhances the overall readability. In addition to the academic rigor displayed in this dissertation, the language use and style contribute significantly to the overall impact of the work.

Questions

1. On page 26, the author gives an example citing Ide (1989: 277) to prove why according to her Brown and Levinson's universalistic approach to politeness as a strategic form of behavior is wrong. Can you explain what is wrong in the first example?

2. In Chapter 3, there is a warning against comparing rituals of different linguacultures to save people from stereotypes, but at the end of the book, the author proposes further research into contrastive pragmatic research. Is it not a contradiction?

3. While the investigation of language and ritual needs a very careful consideration of different ritual frames, what would your suggestion be for a fair comparison of rituals in different languages?

4. To what extent and how do you think second/foreign language learners should be taught about the differences in ritual and language in the different linguacultures?

After learning much about the complex interactional ritual frames and the possible methodological takes we can interpret the realizations of different speech acts with, I would like to congratulate the author for giving such authentic analyses and helping the reader understand the complexity of human communication. Without a doubt, this is an excellent piece of work, and the author deserves the title of Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences after a successful defense of his dissertation.

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