

Review of the doctoral dissertation
“Pragmatemes in audiovisual translation in English-French-Polish
language pairs” submitted by mgr Judyta Mężyk

Mgr Judyta Mężyk prepared her dissertation under the joint supervision of Professor Lucie Gournay (Université Paris-Est Créteil, IMAGER, France) and Professor Andrzej Łyda (University of Silesia, Poland). Written in English, the submitted thesis comprises four chapters preceded by an introduction and followed by a concluding section. These are accompanied by Acknowledgments, abstracts in English, French and Polish, a set of four relevant appendices, as well as lists of references, totalling 327 pages.

The dissertation’s feature that I wish to highlight from the outset is that it combines several large fields of scholarly inquiry, including translation studies – with special attention to audiovisual translation – pragmatics and corpus linguistics. This ambitious task is reflected in the structure of the manuscript under review.

Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to introducing the relevant areas and discussing the methodological considerations. Chapter 1, titled broadly “Theoretical background”, can be seen as structurally twofold. In its first part it offers a grounding in pragmatemes – their various formulations and typological proposals as well as kin notions, some of which have received different terminological labels. The chapter’s second part concentrates on audiovisual translation, giving an overview that is comprehensive and sufficiently detailed. While both of these complex parts are clearly indispensable in the dissertation as preparatory contextualisation for the reporting of the study, I would consider singling out individual chapters for each of them. Such restructuring could have the practical advantage of making the dissertation’s chapters more proportionate in size as well as making the large volume of text and information more graspable. Isolating chapters would also entail assigning to them

titles that could likely be more fine-grained and more informative than the title chapter 1 current bears.

Chapter 2 – “Methods” – presents an elaborate discussion of how the datasets for the study were compiled. The Author shares a range of relevant observations about the subtitling corpus and the lists of pragmatemes. She openly addresses the methodological limitations that have to do with the availability of data for the three languages. Along these lines, a curious point is made by the Author on page 132 as she juxtaposes the corpora to observe that the French and Polish data are less consistently representative of contemporary everyday language than the English data:

“While it must be acknowledged that because of these differences, the language in the English, French, and Polish corpora may vary in terms of register or usability, it is also hypothesized that thanks to the similar time of production of the TV series, these differences will not greatly hinder research on pragmatemes.”

Even though this is an interesting hypothesis, keeping in mind the number of variables that can shape the language used in the respective shows and corpora, I do not find it self-explanatory and would be curious to learn more about the Candidate’s reasoning as well as some of the presuppositions here. Nonetheless, the level of detail in chapter 2 is indicative of the Author’s thorough understanding of the character of research she embarks on, at the same time making the argument easy to follow, and can be useful to researchers who would want to compile analogous datasets. A pertinent case is a practical introduction to the Language Reactor toolkit. Another asset is the multiplicity of resources utilised for lists of pragmatemes, especially that the PhD Candidate approached them critically.

The analytical components of the thesis span chapter 3 and chapter 4. In the former the Author surveys selected (linguistic) properties of pragmatemes across the three corpora and languages. These properties are visibly varied in nature as well as scope – ranging from frequency to the presence of verbless forms or the speech act performed. The choice to include these properties is, however, linked to existing research and is sufficiently substantiated in each case. Above all, the Author, succeeds in identifying a number of insightful patterns, also by mapping the properties against the three-fold categorisation of pragmatemes into plain, charged and loaded ones. The comparative examination makes use of statistical testing whose results are briefly reported on and provide noteworthy points of departure for more research.

A key consideration for framing the results appears to be how far we can extrapolate and what we can infer about everyday language based on filmic language, especially as the

configuration gets additionally nuanced via the technically constrained medium of subtitles. In cases where the results of the subtitling-based study are related to non-filmic and non-subtitling language, special caution needs to be exerted to fully appreciate the complexity of that relationship. Let us take a look at one relevant passage:

“(...) the percentage distribution shows that within the Polish corpus, one- and two-word pragmatemes are the most common. Quite surprisingly, they are more common than in English or French, which seems to challenge a belief that Polish is a language that seems wordy (...)” (p. 154)

While it might not surface in this quotation, the Author is clearly aware of the caveat I signalled above, as a few lines further she qualifies another observation – about the possible reconsideration of the estimated proportion of monolexical pragmatemes in French – by stating as follows: “Naturally, it is important to note the size of the corpus used for this study, its type (TV series captions), and the fact that the definition of pragmatemes used here differs slightly from Blanco and Mejri’s (...)” (p. 154). The point made here is apt but I would claim the formulation could be taken to underplay the possible qualitative differences between types of language material. This is then partly remedied when limitations of the study are reviewed in Conclusions (pp. 263–264).

In chapter 4 the analysis focuses on English-French and English-Polish subtitling of charged pragmatemes. A set of 41 pragmatemes is considered, amounting to a total of 511 occurrences in the English corpus. This part of the dissertation first applies three existing typologies of translation techniques – with only one being specifically dedicated to subtitling – to look into how the relevant pragmatemes are handled. Here again the Author mentions some most valid methodological caveats concerning the definitional criteria of techniques as well as some of the challenges that come with attempts at technique categorisation.

A major contribution of the chapter – and, by extension, of the thesis as a whole – is that the Author develops and details a novel typology of techniques. Comprising ten types, the account was motivated by what Judyta Mężyk calls the “striking lack of the concept of context” in the three typologies she surveyed earlier. Here I see it as unnecessarily reductive to argue that the “concept” or “element” of context is “consistently absent from the proposed models” whereby researchers are limited to looking at “nothing but examples in isolation” (p. 231), at least insofar as the criticism is not presented with more precision, above all with respect to how the presence/absence of context could be operationalised. After all, it is reasonable to suspect none of the authors of the earlier proposals would argue that their

typologies were designed to work context-free. With this in mind, Meżyk's explicit foregrounding of context equips her typology with ample explanatory power, which she convincingly exemplifies in the final part of chapter 4. That part also features a useful quantitative overview of techniques identified by the Author in the French and Polish translations drawing on her typological proposal.

Coming back to the very beginning of the dissertation, I would suggest a fragment of the dissertation's title could be ambiguous with respect to the language configurations under scrutiny. Given its tripartite designation, the expression "English-French-Polish language pairs" remains underspecified while it is significant because it delineates the scope of the study. Notably, the Author herself explains in a footnote on p. 147 as follows: "Studying translation from French to English and Polish and from Polish to English and French would not only require additional time but would also mean other factors should be taken into consideration (...)". At the same time, I have to point out that unpacking the wording would be less economical, which at least to some extent justifies the choice.

Another comment of a rather critical nature regards a point made by the Author very early in the thesis – in the abstract (p. 5) – about the use of pragmatemes. Specifically, the argument is that replacing "Bless you" with "On your health" – a literal translation of the Polish expression "Na zdrowie" – will lead to unsuccessful communication. The Author's reasoning is that the speaker "will not be understood, as such a phrase may rather resemble the one used for raising a toast (*To your health*)". While discussing this example out of context is not productive, it is precisely context that could prevent miscommunication. This line of thinking appears to be well-aligned with the Candidate's context-based approach, as presented in section 4.4.

Overall, the text is well-written and carefully edited, with relatively few issues, e.g. "interlocuter" instead of "interlocutor" (p. 51), "Time Text Style Guides" instead of "Timed Text Style Guides", "would be align" instead of "would be aligned" (p. 133), wording that could be revised for formulaicity ("By a large measure" vs. e.g. "By a large margin", p. 164), or for ease of comprehension (footnote 150, p. 135). Some other minor shortcomings can be spotted in the "Academic references" section – the place of publication is provided in some cases while the general strategy adopted is not to provide it, a hyphen is at times used interchangeably with a dash for page ranges, a comma is inserted instead of a full stop in "Käding, J. 1897,", a full stop is missing after the bracket in "Greenacre, M. J. (2007)".

These, however, do not affect the flow of the argument. An important property of the Author's writing is that she carefully guides the reader to maximise comprehension. This is accomplished through skilfully crafted explanations and diligent cross-referencing. A corresponding technical aspect of the manuscript is the number of footnotes – as many as 281 overall. While the number might require some reducing if the PhD should be published, I see it as indicative of the Author's commendable strive for precision and comprehensiveness. In a similar vein, the PhD Candidate openly and regularly addresses matters she identifies as contentious. When discussing the properties of pragmatemes on page 51, for instance, she talks about the “specific situation of communication” as “the elephant in the room” whereby the subjectivity “can be considered a weak point”.

In conclusion, the thesis under review demonstrates high quality. The study conducted and discussed by mgr Judyta Mężyk – remarkably drawing data from three languages – provides new and valuable knowledge. The research is also contextualised in existing scholarly work, compellingly showing that the PhD candidate is versed in both audiovisual translation and corpus linguistics, and especially in the area where they converge around the phraseological dimension of language use.

I hereby conclude that the doctoral dissertation submitted by mgr Judyta Mężyk unambiguously fulfils the requirements of the Act of 20 July 2018 – The Law on Higher Education and Science. I therefore recommend that the PhD Candidate is accepted to proceed to further stages of the procedure required for the award of the doctoral degree in the field of humanities, in the discipline of linguistics.

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