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AXIOLOGICAL BIAS IN SEMANTICS

Introduction

The tradition of interest in the presence of an axiological layer in language and its perception can be easily traced in Polish linguistics (see, among others, Krzeszowski (1989, 1990, 1997), Puzynina (1982, 1992), Kalisz (1981, 1993), Kalisz and Kubiński (1993), Kleparski (1990, 1997), Kiełtyka (2008)). It is often claimed (see Kalisz, Kubiński and Buller (1996:54)) that Krzeszowski (1989, 1990, 1997) [...] *created a new field of cognitive axiology where the dichotomy or a scale with poles good – bad is equally and may be more important than dichotomy/scale true – false*. Curiously enough, the author provides evidence that the axiological parameter seems to play a much more important role in meaning analyses than previously conceived. Krzeszowski (1989:9) argues for the presence of evaluation in image schemata of the *part – whole* kind, where the *whole* is most often perceived as positive while at a higher level of abstraction it is conceived as *good*. Central to his theory seems to be Krzeszowski's (1990:150) axiological principle: *Words have a tendency to be axiologically loaded with 'good' or 'bad' connotations in proportion to the degree of the human factor associated with them*. The idea behind this principle is that metaphorical expressions are more prone to axiological polarity than non-metaphorical ones. For example, if we compare a metaphorical context *Peter is a hog* and a non-metaphorical one *Peter is a student*, we will certainly notice that valuation is part and parcel of mataphorisation; in that it is the former, but not the latter context, where axiology comes into play. Likewise, as pointed out by Krzeszowski (1997:51), the word *dog*, axiologically neutral when used in its directly meaningful sense becomes highly evaluative when used figuratively as in *he is going to the dogs* or *to give/throw something to the dogs*. In this paper, following Krzeszowski (1997), we will make an attempt to show the pervading presence of the axiological factor in conceptual metaphors of zoosemic type.

The Theory of The Great Chain of Being

In their analysis of proverbs, Lakoff and Turner (1989:160–180) propose the tool termed the GREAT CHAIN METAPHOR (**GCM**) – a cognitive apparatus¹ consisting of four constitutive ingredients: the Theory of Nature of Things (**TNT**), the GENERIC IS SPECIFIC metaphor (**GISM**), the Maxim of Quantity (**MQ**) and the Great Chain of Being (**GCB**) qualified as a cultural model.

The first ingredient, the **TNT**, is regarded as a commonplace theory of forms of beings which are believed to [...] *have essences which lead to the way they behave or function* (see Lakoff and Turner (1989:169)). Specifically, substances are understood as having *essential attributes* such as (**HARD**), (**HEAVY**), (**HIGH**) and these *essential physical attributes* result in *essential physical behaviour* (e.g. heavy things resist movement). Plants are additionally characterised by possessing *essential biological natures* which result in *essential biological behaviour* (e.g. certain kinds of flowers (**BLOOM**) in spring). Higher animals additionally display *essential instinctive natures* which lead to *essential instinctive behaviour* (e.g. cats (**HUNT**) mice). Finally, human beings are viewed as possessing *essential character attributes* which are responsible for *characteristic behaviour* (e.g. benevolent people (**HELP**) the needy). Thus, in short, the **TNT** is a commonplace theory of the relationship between attributes and behaviour typical of forms of being.

According to Lakoff and Turner (1989:162), the second ingredient, namely, GENERIC IS SPECIFIC, is a kind of metaphor which [...] *maps a single specific-level schema onto an indefinitely large number of parallel specific-level schemas that all have the same generic-level structure as the source domain schema*. Therefore, in other words, [...] *GENERIC IS SPECIFIC is a generic-level metaphor which preserves the generic level-structure of the target domain [...] and imports as much as possible of the generic level structure of the source domain* (Lakoff and Turner (1989:164)).

The next ingredient employed in the internal structure of the **GCM**, that is the communicative **MQ**² is understood by Lakoff and Turner (1989:171) in the following way: *Be as informative as is required and not more so*. As the authors put it, [...] *its role is to limit severely what can be understood in terms of what* (Lakoff and Turner (1989:173)). The **MQ** is necessary in establishing the mappings of information from one level of the chain to the other to the extent that only the *highest-ranking properties available* are mapped and superfluous information is not taken into consideration. For example, the context *John is a lion* highlights such semantic elements as (**COURAGE**), (**BRAVERY**),

¹ On this issue see, among others, Krikmann (1994).

² The **MQ**, widely employed in pragmatics, emerges from Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle.

(FEARLESSNESS) and the fact that lions have four legs, manes and tails is ignored and backgrounded due to the **MQ**.

The theoretical bases of the last and potentially the most important ingredient, the concept of the **GCB**, were developed early on by such ancient philosophers as Plato and Aristotle (cf. Nisbet (1982:35)), and it is worth mentioning that the **GCB** has not merely survived into our times but – more importantly – its mechanisms are reflected in various evolutionary theories and, recently, also in semantic investigations of natural languages. The basic **GCB** is defined by attributes and behaviours, arranged in a hierarchy. The extended version of the **GCB**, employed in axiological semantics, may be represented schematically in the following manner (Krzyszowski (1997:68)):

Being	mode of existence	the highest property
GOD	<i>being in itself</i>	<i>divinity</i>
HUMANS	<i>spiritual</i>	<i>reason/soul</i>
ANIMALS	<i>animate</i>	<i>instincts</i>
PLANTS	<i>vital</i>	<i>life</i>
INORGANIC THINGS	<i>physical</i>	<i>material substance</i>

It seems relatively unimportant that the exact border lines between particular levels of the hierarchy may prove difficult to establish, e.g. bacteria are beings residing somewhere at the edge of flora and fauna, whereas viruses are animate/inanimate in nature. What is crucial, however, is the fact that the beings/entities belonging to respective levels of the hierarchy are characterised by features which distinguish a given level from lower levels. For example, as Krzyszowski (1997:66) puts it, rock, sand, water, air are merely substances, while man-made objects like ships, machines, cars, additionally, have a part-whole functional structure. In turn, trees and other plants have substance, a part-whole functional structure, and, additionally, life. Insects, fishes, mammals and other animals, apart from the properties typical of plants, have instincts, which are manifested in animal behaviour. Higher animals possess all these properties supported by such interior states, as desires, emotions and certain cognitive abilities. Humans have all the above mentioned properties, and – additionally – the ability of abstract thinking, reasoning, forming judgements, communicating through language and, last but not least, self-awareness. God is regarded as an absolute, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and perfect being, and – although not conceivable in any human terms – is in some religions credited with all the properties characterising all lower beings with an affinity of other properties – Being in Itself or Ultimate Being (see Krzyszowski (1997:67)).

Ultimately, the mixture of the **GCB** and the Theory of Nature of Things results in a *hierarchical folk theory of forms of being and how they behave* which is depicted in Lakoff and Turner (1989:171) in the following way:

The TNT + The GCB

HUMANS: *Higher-order attributes lead to higher-order behavior*

ANIMALS: *Instinctual attributes lead to instinctual behavior*

PLANTS: *Biological attributes lead to biological behavior*

INORGANIC THINGS: *Structural and natural physical attributes lead to structural and natural physical behavior*

Thus, these four ingredients, i.e. the **TNT**, the **GCB**, the **GISM** and the **MQ** constitute the so-called **GCM** which is [...] *a recurring conceptual complex made up of a metaphor, a commonsense theory, and a communicative principle* (Lakoff and Turner (1989:171)). Given the five levels of the **GCB** presented above and the two possible directions of mapping, i.e. upward and downward, the number of all possible metaphors coherent with the **GCB** is altogether twenty (see Krzeszowski (1997:161)). Specifically, ten of these metaphors involve upward mapping, in which the source domain occupies a lower position on the **GCB** than the target domain, e.g. *Peter is a pig* (where being a *pig* implies being physically and/or morally filthy). In turn, the other ten involve downward mapping, in which the source domain occupies a higher position on the **GCB** than the target domain, e.g. *This dog is loyal and friendly* (where loyal and friendly are features typical of the human level of the **GCB**). Krzeszowski (1997:161) formulates the following set of metaphors:

1. <GOD IS A HUMAN BEING>,³
2. <GOD IS AN ANIMAL>;
3. <GOD IS A PLANT>;
4. <GOD IS A THING>;
5. <A HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL>;
6. <A HUMAN BEING IS A PLANT>;
7. <A HUMAN BEING IS A THING>;
8. <AN ANIMAL IS A PLANT>;
9. <AN ANIMAL IS A THING>;
10. <A PLANT IS A THING>;
11. <A THING IS A PLANT>;
12. <A THING IS AN ANIMAL>;
13. <A THING IS A HUMAN BEING>;
14. <A THING IS (A) GOD>;
15. <A PLANT IS AN ANIMAL>;
16. <A PLANT IS A HUMAN BEING>;
17. <A PLANT IS (A) GOD>;
18. <AN ANIMAL IS A HUMAN BEING>;

³ See Suchostawska (2004) for a very revealing analysis of the metaphor <GOD IS A HUMAN BEING>.

19. <AN ANIMAL IS (A) GOD>;
20. <A HUMAN BEING IS (A) GOD>.

As argued by Krzeszowski (1997), not all of the metaphors listed above are equally productive, and some may prove to be hard, if not impossible to materialise. In this paper we are mainly interested in two particular metaphors, namely <A HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL> and <AN ANIMAL IS A HUMAN BEING>. Thus, an attempt is made to show that features can be transferred from a higher level of the great **GCB** to a lower one, e.g. *a faithful, friendly dog*, or from a lower level to a higher one, e.g. *This man is a pig* (applied, usually contemptuously or opprobriously, to a person).

Lakoff and Turner (1989:172) point out that the **GCM** is [...] *a tool of great power and scope* because:

[...] it allows us to comprehend general human character traits in terms of well-understood nonhuman attributes; and, conversely, it allows us to comprehend less well-understood aspects of the nature of animals and objects in terms of better-understood human characteristics.

Therefore, Lakoff and Turner (1989:195) make use of the mechanism of the **GCB** to explore the meaning of such metaphors as *Achilles is a lion* or *Man is a wolf*, i.e. metaphors of the form <A is a B> where **B** is a concept characterised by a metaphorical schema. In the metaphor *Achilles is a lion* certain instinctive traits of a lion are perceived metaphorically in terms of human character traits, such as courage.⁴ The authors claim that the expression *Achilles is a lion* helps us to understand the character of Achilles in terms of a certain instinctive trait of lions, a trait which is already [...] *metaphorically understood in terms of a character trait of humans*. Interestingly, to use Lakoff and Turner's (1989:195) terminology, [...] *understanding the character of Achilles in terms of the instinct of the lion, asks us to understand the steadfastness of Achilles' courage in terms of the rigidity of animal instinct*. The authors argue that the mechanism by which this works is the **GCM**. In the case in hand, (STEADFASTNESS), being of higher-order character, is understood in terms of (RIGIDITY) of lower-order instinct.

As noted by Krzeszowski (1997:80), [...] *people have a great tendency to ascribe higher values to various things and concepts at lower levels on the Great Chain of Being*. It seems understandable that, when conceptualising and valuating, we tend to perceive reality in terms of the human level. A tendency of this kind is referred to as **anthropomorphisation** (humanisation) and **personification** of entities above and below the human level on the **GCB**. It is true that humanisation can be expressed by means of valuations in that various

⁴ On this issue see also Kleparski (1996).

animals are valued either positively (e.g. *dog, puppy*) or negatively (e.g. *cur, mongrel*) at the animate level of values. As argued by Krzeszowski (1997:81), in various cultures and languages different properties characterising animals may be highlighted and metaphorically mapped on the human level of the **GCB**. According to Baider and Gesuato (2003:15), research on choices of metaphors within a given language confirms that each culture defines its own social reality. For example, in French, metaphorical terms cross mapping crustaceans and sexuality are relatively common: *crevette* ‘shrimp’ > ‘darling (a term of endearment, typically for a child), a female lover’; *langoustine* ‘a small lobster’ > ‘a female partner/lover’; *pieuvre* ‘an octopus’ > ‘a demanding mistress or kept woman’; *moule* ‘a mussel’ > ‘female genitals’. By contrast, such correspondences are – naturally – not typical of Italian or Polish.

As a rule, the properties which are mapped in particular metaphors are most frequently language-specific. For example, pigs have a bad reputation for being both filthy and gluttonous. Therefore, in Polish the abstract noun *świnstwo* ‘dirty trick’ derives from *świnia* ‘pig’, and it is understood as a mapping of animal instinctive behaviour (being (FILTHY) and (GLUTTONOUS)) on the level of human values to be perceived as human immoral behaviour (being (MORALLY FILTHY)). This operation involves an extension of values from the animate to the human level, as formulated by Krzeszowski (1997:81) [...] *from the level where instinctive behaviour is most salient to the human level, at which moral judgements give rise to the resulting values*. On the other hand, the very same pig which symbolises dirtiness and greed in one culture is an attribute of strength for the Chinese and a symbol of luck for Germans, for whom the context *Ich habe Schwein gehabt* is understood as ‘I have had luck.’ Interestingly, as noted by Kleparski (1997:171), Mod.Czech *žaba/žabka* is used to denote girls and young women, Mod.Pol. *żabka* ‘dim. frog’ is employed with reference to ‘a loved woman, sweetie’ in a similar way to Polish *kotek* ‘dim. cat, pussy’ and secondarily ‘honey, sweetie, a term of endearment’, while its Mod.Russ. equivalent *лягушка* ‘a frog’ is almost never used familiarly with reference to young females because the connotations of this lexical category are entirely different, that is, those of (SLEAZINESS), (COLDNESS). Additionally, in Mod.Russ. the lexical category *koza* ‘a goat’ associates with such attributive values as (LIVELINESS) and (ENERGY), while Mod.G. *Ziege* ‘a goat’ connotes (NAIVETY), (STUPIDITY) and is close in meaning to Mod.Pol. *baran* ‘a ram’, *osioł* ‘a donkey’, *cielę* ‘a calf’ as well as Mod.G. *Gans* ‘a goose’ and Mod.Chinese *zhu* 豬 ‘a pig’ as in *ben chun zhu* 笨/蠢豬 ‘a stupid pig’ > ‘an idiot’, *si zhu* 死豬 ‘a dead pig’ > ‘a stupid person’.

On the other hand, notice that Mod.Pol. *ropucha* ‘a toad’ applied to ‘an old fat and ugly woman’ has similar connotations to Mod.E. *toad* which is secondarily used ‘as a term of insult for a person’. It is also interesting to note that languages choose a variety of animal names with reference to certain

occupations/professions. And so, the lexical categories *pig*, *dog*, *bull* and *chicken* can be used with reference to the police in a number of languages, e.g. Mod.E. (*pig*), Mod.Pol. (*psy* ‘dogs’), Mod.G. (*Bulle* ‘a bull’) and Mod.Fr. (*poulet* ‘a chicken’); Mod.Sl. *straka* ‘a magpie’ used in the sense ‘a thief’; Mod.Sp. *canguro* ‘a kangaroo’ functions as ‘a babysitter’; Mod.Pol. *pijawka* ‘a leech’ is employed to denote ‘a lawyer’. Other concepts, like (STUPIDITY), (NAIVETY), (PROSTITUTION), (UGLINESS), are also frequently expressed with the aid of animal names, but language-specificity may be held responsible for certain differences, e.g. Mod.Hu. *liba* ‘a goose’, Mod.Russ. *гусь* ‘a goose’, Mod.Pol. *gęś* ‘a goose’, Mod.G. *Gans* ‘a goose’ are used to convey the sense ‘a stupid woman’; Mod.Sp. *zorra* ‘a vixen’ as well as *pájara* ‘a female bird’, Mod.Pol. *mewka* ‘(little) sea-gull’, Mod.Russ. *бабочка* ‘a butterfly’, Mod.Hu. *éjszakai pillangó* ‘a night butterfly’ acquired the secondary sense ‘a prostitute/whore’; Mod.Sp. *foca* ‘a seal’ designates ‘a fat person, particularly a woman’, Mod.Fr. *haridelle* ‘an old horse’ is used with reference to ‘a thin and ugly woman’,⁵ Mod.Pol. *kobyła* ‘(derogatively) mare’ metaphorically surfaces as ‘a stupid, ugly woman’. Likewise, extensions of values from higher to lower levels of the hierarchy are also possible and, in fact, do take place in the mechanism of the **GCB**. For example, the conceptual elements (LOYALTY) and (BRAVERY) are primarily related to the human level of values. However, through the process of anthropomorphisation they can be extended downwards to the level of animals, which, in turn, makes it possible for us to refer to dogs as loyal (e.g. Polish *To jest najwierniejszy pies jakiego kiedykolwiek mieli* ‘This is the most loyal dog they have ever had’) and ostriches as cowardly (e.g. *He is like an ostrich – always hides away from unpleasant reality*).

Conclusion

The aim set to this paper was to shed some light on the presence of an axiological layer in language, the working of the Great Chain of Being, its (bi)directionality and implications, as well as the fact that axiological values/features/elements are not viewed as bundles, but rather they are grouped into sets: positive, neutral, negative based on axiological marking (see Kleparski

⁵ As the *OED* informs us, English *harridan* is generally supposed to be an alteration of Mod.Fr. *haridelle* ‘an old jade of a horse (16th century); also, a gaunt ill-favoured woman’ but connecting forms are not known. In the 18th century this lexical item was employed in the sense ‘a haggard old woman; a vixen; a decayed strumpet, usually a term of vituperation’. The following *OED* quotations visualise the situation in hand.

a1700 *Harridan*, one that is half Whore, half Bawd.

a1745 The nymphs with whom you first began, Are each become a *harridan*.

(1990, 1997), Kiełtyka (2008)). Thus, the structure of the **GCB** is characterised by its bi-directionality which involves upward and downward mapping of features/attributes. In the case of upward mapping the source domain occupies a lower position on the **GCB** than the target domain. On the other hand, downward mapping involves the transfer of features/attributes from the source domain which occupies a higher position on the **GCB** than the target domain. As shown above, the number of all possible metaphors coherent with the **GCB** is twenty, out of which two, i.e. <A HUMAN BEING IS AN ANIMAL> and <AN ANIMAL IS A HUMAN BEING>, were briefly examined. It remains to be hoped that the future will bring more studies devoted to the axiological layer in language which would examine the other eighteen metaphors pertaining to the structure of the **GCB**.

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