

## Recenzija

### "Modern Hellenism": the pragmatem

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### Xavier BLANCO, Salah MEJRI, *Les pragmatèmes. Préface d'Alain Rey, Paris, Classiques Garnier, 2018, 214 p.*

In prefacing the recently published book by X. Blanco and S. Mejri, Alain Rey describes the pragmatem as "modern Hellenism" which is, however, "mysterious for the vast majority of French speakers" (Rey, p. 7). Conceived by Igor Mel'čuk as part of the *Sense-Text Theory* at the time of this "conceptual commotion" that the language sciences experienced in the 20th century, the concept of pragmatem is still shrouded in mystery, and not only for French speakers. And yet it is by no means a marginal phenomenon, but a linguistic unit present in thousands in each language. Moreover, some of these units have a very high frequency of use. We use them daily, in the most different contexts, for example, by reading the instructions for use of a product, by writing messages or, quite simply, by saying *Au revoir !* or *Ne quittez pas*. It is therefore difficult to overestimate the importance of the pioneering work by Xavier Blanco and Salah Mejri, devoted entirely to pragmatems. By its exhaustiveness, the diversity of the themes, the wealth of examples analyzed, it constitutes an extremely important source of information for all those who are interested in the universals of language.

The research of Xavier Blanco and Salah Mejri is structured in four main chapters: the first deals with definitive questions, the second and third focus on the problems of the census and the treatment of pragmatems in dictionaries as well as in learning books and books of reference, and finally the last, offers us a lexicographic inventory of these particular linguistic units.

The first chapter, which serves as the theoretical basis for this monograph, is based on the following three essential points. Starting from the observation that "only use is at the origin of pragmatems" (p. 26), the authors consider, first of all, that as a subclass of phrasemes, pragmatems are autonomous statements, which are fundamentally polylexical (even if the monolexical pragmatems are not entirely marginal). They share, in this respect, a certain number of phraseological characteristics, but they often have a compositional meaning. Second, the researchers draw attention to the fact that the prototypical pragmatems, unlike other classes of restricted phrases, are "more anchored in the communication situation" (p.35) and are in relationship with its deictics. These can be temporal (*À demain, Bonne journée, Joyeux anniversaire !*), Spatial (*Entrée interdite, Issue de secours, Espace fumeurs*), instrumental (*Allô ?*), etc. Finally, the last point of major importance concerns, according to the authors, "the ritualization" of pragmatems. It is a diachronic process "which is in fact not only a linguistic product, but also of an anthropological nature (see the indications on foodstuffs and medicines, road signs, greetings, etc.) » (P. 22).

The last three parts of the first chapter are devoted to pragmatems in the general typology of sentences. The authors of the book pay particular attention to a distinction that is fundamental to their study, namely the distinction between semantic-lexical phrases and lexical phrases. Belonging with clichés (statements such as *Quelle heure est-il ? C'est la vie !*) and paremias (proverbs, proverbial sentences, sayings) to one of the three major classes of semantic-lexical phrases, pragmatems have a semantic structure which is not freely chosen by the speaker. Linked inseparably to a certain conceptual content, it always remains the privileged means of expressing said content. So, in order to send Christmas greetings to someone, we use a semantic-lexical phrase "*Joyeux Noël !*", even if other combinations of words (*J'espère que vous passerez un Noël fort agréable* or *Que les fêtes de Noël vous soient douces*) would, a priori, be understandable in this context.

The second chapter of this book concerns monolingual, bilingual and specialized lexicography. Its first part is devoted to the treatment of pragmatems in major monolingual dictionaries of French. It builds on Xavier Blanco's previous empirical research, which consisted of systematically consulting the census and lexicographic description of pragmatems in the *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (now TLFi) and in the *Grand Robert de la Langue Française* electronic version (now GRLFi), from a previously established list of 250 pragmatems. For the

convenience of presentation, the authors have grouped the observations into four sections which correspond to the different morphosyntactic configurations of the pragmatems studied. Thus, these are NOMINAL SYNTAGMS, formed by Name + Adjective (*Accèsinterdit ; Eau non potable ; Service compris*), Adjective + Name (*Libre service ; Purcoton*), Name + Preposition + Name (*Danger de mort ; Issue de secours*) as well as formulas of the Défense de [...] or Prière de [...] (*Défense de fumer ; Prière de ne pas déranger*), of NOMINAL SYNTAGMS, MORE COMPLETELY (*Liquidation totaleavant cessation d'activités ; Stationnementautorisédimanche et joursférés ; Tarifrédit sur présentation d'un justificatif*), ADJECTIVAL SYNTAGMS (*Lavableen machine ; Interdit à [...]*) and, finally, VERBAL SYNTAGMES (*Attachezvousreceinture ; Servirchaud ; Entrez sans frapper*). The analysis in this part of the book has allowed the authors to draw not very optimistic and rather alarming conclusions. Even the TLFi and GRLFi, these two excellent and universally recognized dictionaries, "not only fail to adequately describe the pragmatems but, in most cases, do not even mention them" (p. 70). It turns out that barely 30% of the units in the elaborate corpus can be considered to be present in at least one of the two major dictionaries consulted: lexicographers "tend to consider them, wrongly, not as linguistic units, but as free syntagmatic formations" (p. 60). According to Xavier Blanco and Salah Mejri, this is due to the fact that the pragmatem is not yet recognized and identified as a particular linguistic unit.

An examination, although rather brief, of specialized dictionaries of French or including French as one of the languages of description, offered the authors of this book a rather disappointing panorama concerning the treatment of pragmatems. However, as Blanco and Mejri point out, "a frequent consultation of these works makes it possible to" find a few pearls "(p. 94).

Bilingual lexicography, it seems, is much more welcoming to pragmatems, because their encoding cannot be "taken for granted for obvious reasons": this process highlights "the restricted, and therefore unpredictable, nature of pragmatems" (P. 72). And yet the analysis of the best samples of bilingual French-English lexicography (the *Grand Dictionnaire Hachette-Oxford*, 2007, Le Robert & Collins, 2010) and of bilingual Spanish-French lexicography (*Diccionario Larousse Español-Francés*, 2003 and the *Diccionario Espasa Grand, español-francés*, 2000) allowed the authors to highlight several problematic cases in the treatment of pragmatems. As Xavier Blanco and Salah Mejri point out, these autonomous statements, which have both a lexical and situational anchoring, and are ritualized, generally crossing facts relating to performativity, linguistic and behavioral stereotypy, in certain cases go beyond the strictly linguistic framework to engage an anthropological dimension, and it is this last dimension that poses the most difficulties for lexicographers. The equivalences proposed in the dictionaries are most often approximate and not perfect equivalences, and they necessarily imply neither the same semantic content nor the same enunciating constraints. This is why quite often bilingual dictionaries find it difficult to provide satisfactory solutions for the translation of pragmatems.

The third chapter of X. Blanco and S. Mejri's book is devoted to the analysis of FLE (French as a Foreign language) textbooks, grammars and conversation guides, intended for foreign language learners. The material they contain and the communicative tasks that they foresee most often correspond to the Discovery level (A1) or the Survival level (A2) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. And yet, to a certain degree, these are works which, by their target reader and even by their content, are similar to bilingual dictionaries, even if the latter are usually targeted at the Advanced Intermediate Level (B2) and the High level of language proficiency (C1). We find the part of this chapter that deals with phrasebooks very interesting. Usually, they attract little attention from linguists: perceived as strictly utilitarian products, they are treated in the same suspicious manner as all "miracle methods" in learning. However, a good quality conversation guide can be very useful for the user because it can help her produce and understand keywords, the most common expressions and even more specific sentences, related to her particular needs or concrete situations. The extremely rich synchronic study of pragmatems in Russian, German, Spanish and French phrasebooks, which builds on Xavier Blanco's previous research, is significantly deepened by the diachronic study of French pragmatems in *Manières de langage*, collection of model dialogues from the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century. From the first point of view, this work should certainly not resemble current conversation guides, since the dialogues presented were intended to be learned by heart and used as needed. And yet, as the authors point out, their general plan is comparable to that of conversation guides today. You can find there, for example, *Partir en voyage, Les préparatifs de voyage, Le repas d'adieu, En route : demander son chemin*. Having organized the presentation of the pragmatems from past centuries by acts of speech (*Saluer, remercier, Inviter, demander et proposer*), the authors offer us very interesting observations by showing how these semantic-lexical phrases revive, in a way, an era disappeared.

Finally, the last chapter of the book is devoted to the lexicographic inventory of pragmatems. The word *inventaire* replaces here the word *dictionnaire* which, nowadays, has become a sort of a "master key" for naming works which are not strictly lexicographical. The authors use the former in order to show that the pragmatem as a unit of phrastic type requires a format of description different from those which are applied for lexical units. By circulating with X. Blanco and S. Mejri through the main structures of the lexicographic work, namely the macrostructure (the set of lemmas forming the nomenclature), the microstructure (the article itself which includes the pragmatem) and the mesostructure (the possible subentries and the connection of pragmatems in the source language with pragmatems in the target language), we become aware of all these extremely complex problems, unavoidable difficulties, linked to the lexicographic treatment of pragmatems.

Finally, we would like to stop on the last two points which seem important to us. First, on the concluding part of the book. It is obvious that the main text of the book is followed, as is customary in research, with reasoned and convincing conclusions. What is really unexpected and promising are "pending" questions that follow the conclusions and to which, hopefully, X. Blanco and S. Mejri will come back one day.

Second, we would like to draw the attention of readers to the alphabetical index of the main pragmatems. Combined over a dozen of pages, they will be invaluable not only for lexicographers but also for translators and teachers of FLE.

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The research of Xavier Blanco and Salah Mejri who, chapter after chapter, dissects several aspects relating to the nature, functioning and presentation of pragmatems, by showing their major role for lexicography, teaching, translation and processing automatic language learning is, without a doubt, one of the most remarkable and original linguistic events of recent years which will serve as an indisputable reference in any subsequent study of the phrases.