



РЕЧЕВЫЕ МЕХАНИЗМЫ И ЕДИНИЦЫ ТЕКСТОВОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu2.2021.2.4>

UDC 81'1:004.823

LBC 81.002



Submitted: 30.10.2020

Accepted: 12.01.2021

RITUAL FRAME INDICATING EXPRESSIONS (AN ACADEMIC CONVERSATION)¹

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Abstract. The present paper is based on an interview, conducted by Victor V. Leontyev with Juliane House and Dániel Z. Kádár. It provides an overview of a new theory in pragmatics, namely, Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (RFIEs). This theory provides a bottom-up and corpus-based approach to the study of various pragmatically important expressions through which the participants of an interaction indicate their awareness of the Ritual Frame underlying the interaction. 'Ritual Frame' encompasses a cluster of standard situations in which the rights and obligations of the participants are clearly defined. The corpus-based RFIE approach complements sociopragmatic approaches to various expression types, including so-called 'politeness markers', honorifics, forms of address and so on, and it also helps us to systematically capture the relationship between expressions and speech acts. In studying RFIEs, the analyst focuses on the ways in which RFIEs spread across various standard situations. The study of this issue also allows the researcher to contrastively examine the use of RFIEs across linguacultures. Such contrastive research helps us to unearth major linguacultural differences. For example, the research of J. House and D.Z. Kádár has revealed that while in East Asian linguacultures such as Chinese RFIEs tend to be strongly associated with a particular speech act, this relationship is casual in Western linguacultures.

Key words: Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions, standard situations, conventionalisation, politeness, contrastive pragmatic analysis.

Citation. House J., Kádár D.Z., Leontyev V.V. Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (An Academic Conversation). *Vestnik Volgogradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Seriya 2. Yazykoznanie* [Science Journal of Volgograd State University. Linguistics], 2021, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 42-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu2.2021.2.4>

ЯЗЫКОВЫЕ ИНДИКАТОРЫ РИТУАЛЬНЫХ ФРЕЙМОВ (НАУЧНАЯ БЕСЕДА)¹

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Аннотация. В материале представлена новая теория в области прагматики, а именно теория изучения языковых индикаторов ритуальных фреймов (ЯИРФ). Она базируется на «нисходяще-восходящем» и корпусном подходах к изучению прагматически важных выражений, при помощи которых участники коммуникативного взаимодействия указывают на свою осведомленность о ритуальном фрейме как фундаменте общения. Ритуальный фрейм охватывает кластер стандартных ситуаций, в которых четко определены права и обязанности участников коммуникативного действия. Опирающийся на анализ данных из языковых корпусов подход с применением ЯИРФ дополняет существующие социопрагматические подходы к изучению различных языковых единиц и выражений, включая «маркеры вежливости», гоноративы, формы обращений и т. д., и позволяет на методической основе установить взаимосвязь между языковыми выражениями и речевыми актами. Исследуя ЯИРФ, аналитик фокусирует свое внимание на способах, при помощи которых ЯИРФ распространяются в различных стандартных ситуациях. Изучение процесса распространения этих языковых единиц открывает для лингвиста возможность сравнить применение ЯИРФ в разных лингвокультурах и выявить особенности той или иной лингвокультуры. В качестве примера приведены результаты исследования Ю. Хоузе и Д.З. Кадара, демонстрирующие, что в восточноазиатских лингвокультурах, таких как китайская, ЯИРФ жестко связаны с конкретным речевым актом, а в западных лингвокультурах эта взаимосвязь случайна.

Ключевые слова: языковые индикаторы ритуальных фреймов, стандартные ситуации, конвенционализация, теория вежливости, сравнительный прагматический анализ.

Цитирование. Хоузе Ю., Кадар Д. З., Леонтьев В. В. Языковые индикаторы ритуальных фреймов (научная беседа) // Вестник Волгоградского государственного университета. Серия 2, Языкознание. – 2021. – Т. 20, № 2. – С. 42–46. – (На англ. яз.). – DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15688/jvolsu.2021.2.4>

Introduction

The present essay, which is based on an academic conversation conducted by Victor V. Leontyev about the work of Juliane House and Dániel Z. Kádár, discusses their Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (RFIE) Theory. This theory systematises the use of many different pragmatically important expressions, and among such expressions it devotes special attention to expressions which are popularly associated with certain speech acts. In many linguacultures, there are standard situations in which the use of certain

expressions – such as “please” in English, “bitte” in German, “пожалуйста” in Russian and *qing* 请 in Chinese – is expected. Such expressions have been conventionally defined as “politeness markers”. RFIE Theory challenges the unquestioned association between such expressions and politeness, by pointing out that RFIEs indicate rights and obligations and a broader “Ritual Frame”. The relationship between RFIEs and politeness, as well as the cluster of standard situations that a particular RFIE expression indicates, varies greatly across linguacultures.

Standard Situation

The concept of standard situation goes back to the pioneering work by Juliane House on expressions indicating the speech act of Request. House argues as follows:

The notion of a standard situation involves participants' rather fixed expectations and perceptions of social role. Role relations are transparent and predetermined. The requester has the right and the requestee an obligation, the degree of imposition involved in the request is low, as is the perceived degree of difficulty of realizing it. In a nutshell, the participants know where and who they are. Clearly, the distinction between standard and non-standard situations is not clear-cut [House, 1989, p. 115].

The concept of standard situation as well as the broader concept of the Ritual Frame represent a pragmlinguistic counterpart to the concept of "activity type" suggested by Stephen Levinson [1992]. Levinson considers activity type to be a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted bounded events with constraints on participants, settings and so on. The concept of standard situation does not only include what is known as "institutional discourse" but rather covers any situation where rights and obligations prevail [Kádár, House, 2020c, p. 143]. Typical examples of standard situations are reprimanding a car owner by a policeman when the policeman asks the owner to move the car, and a request to clean up the kitchen made between people sharing a flat [Kádár, House, 2020c, p. 143; House, 1989, p. 108]. It is evident that rights and obligations prevail in such situations, and so interactions in such situations are embedded in an invisible Ritual Frame.

Ritual Frame

Ritual Frame refers to a cluster of standard situations in which rights and obligations prevail. Interactants are expected to follow these rights and obligations to maintain their face [Kádár, House, 2020b, p. 641]. The notion of a Ritual Frame is of a higher order and more abstract than standard situation as Ritual Frame encompasses a cluster of standard situations. That is, a standard situation is something particular, while the Ritual Frame is more general [Kádár, House, 2020b, p. 642]. House

and Kádár point out that their use of the expression "frame" differs from how it has been used in a body of top-down research (see: [Tannen, 1979; Tannen, House, 1987; Terkourafi, 2001; 2005; Bednarek, 2005]). Ritual Frame evokes communally oriented forms of behavior [Bax, 2010]. The idea of 'communality' is interpreted in the following way: in interactions anchored in standard situations, in which rights and obligations are always lurking, there is an omnipresent sense of a communality even though the community itself might only be imaginatively present.

A Ritual Frame of an interaction differs from the concept of abiding norms or 'politic behavior' [Watts, 2003]: it covers all instances of language use that display a decreased sense of individualistic interactional engagement and related face-work.

Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions

The concept of Ritual Frame Indicating Expressions (RFIEs) helps one to investigate the relationship between expressions and ritual and conventional norms governing the use of these expressions [Kádár, House, 2020a, p. 83]. When language users engage in an interaction in which it is important to linguistically showcase awareness of who and where they are, their language use and related perceptions may change. Awareness of the Ritual Frame tends to be indicated vis-à-vis linguistic expressions, including ones associated with speech acts such as Request, Apology and Thanks, as well as honorifics, deference markers, terms of address and so on [Kádár, House, 2020a, pp. 83-84]. Typical examples of such expressions cover terms of address [Braun, 1988] and honorifics [Ide, 1989].

A framework of RFIEs can facilitate a comparison of the pragmatic scope of expressions which are conventionally defined as 'politeness markers' [House, 1989; Ide, 1989]. Such expressions constitute a key aspect of our day-to-day communication, and, as such, they need to be kept on the agenda of pragmatic research. The assumption that such expressions are in some way interrelated with politeness clearly prevails as the expression 'politeness marker' continues to be used, particularly outside the scope mainstream politeness theory despite criticism voiced about the politeness-form interface.

An important concept in RFIE Theory is the notion of ‘speech act-anchoredness’. This concept implies that in certain linguacultures, such as Chinese, RFIEs are so intimately tied to a particular speech act that they can practically have no other pragmatic function. Although this may sound straightforward, for someone who is unfamiliar with East Asian languages such as Chinese, this fact can be rather surprising. After carrying out contrastive pragmatic research on German and English RFIEs versus their Chinese counterparts, House and Kadar found that it is only in the Chinese linguaculture that RFIEs are invariably speech act-anchored, which means they are inseparably attached to a particular speech act. In English and German this is not the case, which means that RFIEs in these linguacultures often fulfill many other functions as well.

It is worth noting that there are other frameworks which focus on expressions in particular, such as ‘situation-bound utterances’ (e.g.: [Kecskes, 2016]). Basically, in such theories one first identifies a situation and then the expressions that people generally use in this particular situation are studied. The RFIE approach is radically different: analysts following the RFIE Theory base their work on how expressions are used in two or more corpora and do not consider the notion of situation first. That is, the researcher first analyses which types of situations are indicated by the expressions in the corpora studied. As a next step, the researcher considers issues such as the interactional ritual use of the expressions under investigation, their relationship to speech acts, and so on.

In sum, RFIE Theory implies that, first, one should identify the expressions in the corpora and then analyse what these expressions do in certain situational contexts. One does not start the other way around with either the situation or something else at the outset. The very term ‘Ritual Frame Indicating Expression’ indicates this quite clearly. One needs to start RFIE analysis with ‘innocent’ little words and see what comes out of one’s corpus-based study of these expressions. This is basically a non-essentialist, bottom-up and data-based approach to the cross-cultural study of expressions. A key advantage of this framework is that it allows us to study various important phenomena such as the effect of globalisation on language use. For example, J. House and D.Z. Kádár [2021] recently published a study of RFIEs in global marketing materials.

The reason why J. House and D.Z. Kádár were able to look at language use in this alternative way is that they ventured beyond their respective ‘comfort zones’: they were able to bring together the original speech act and ‘standard situation’ approach developed by J. House and interaction ritual theory developed by D.Z. Kádár.

Conclusion

RFIE Theory integrates pragmatically important expressions and speech acts, as well as the broader unit discourse by systematising the interactional use of RFIEs. This theory is part of a more comprehensive framework, which J. House and D.Z. Kádár present in a recent monograph (see: [House, Kádár, 2021]). When it comes to RFIEs, the main argument is that one cannot conduct proper research about speech act and discourse without also involving expressions, and this is particularly the case if cross-cultural pragmatics is at play. One also needs to consider how expressions relate to speech acts, and how speech acts are, in turn, embedded in larger units of discourse.

NOTE

¹ The research of Dániel Z. Kádár and Juliane House was funded by the Momentum (Lendület) Research Grant of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (LP2017/5) and the Research Grant of the National Research Development and Innovation Office, Hungary (132969), both hosted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Interactional Ritual Momentum Research Group, located in the Research Centre for Linguistics, Hungary and directed by Dániel Z. Kádár.

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