

Contradiction and disagreement in Polish historical news discourse – (im)politeness and altered speech acts

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Not only (im)politeness, but also speech act theory has been among the most robust frameworks in contemporary and historical pragmatics. Although the empirical scope of speech act studies has broadened significantly over the last decade, research using historical material in languages other than English remains modest. Similarly, interfaces between speech acts and (im)politeness have not been fully explored.

The paper focuses on a sample of historical Polish data from eighteenth to twentieth century periodical press. The study explores the relationship between conventionalised expressions and specific speech act functions in historical news. The methodology relies on a mixed-method approach and follows the steps proposed in House and Kádár (2021: 160). Periodical press in the late modern period covers genres constructed discursively as debate (responses to letters to the editor; academic and philosophical conversations, etc.) for which politeness considerations are of utmost relevance.

Speech acts of contradiction and disagreement are approached with the notion of 'speech-act anchoredness', i.e. “those uses of a conventionalised expression in which the default associated function of an expression is not realised” (House and Kádár 2021). The relevant conventional expressions are extracted from based on contemporary normative sources (e.g. multilingual dictionaries; e.g. Trotz 1764). Then, their uses in the analysed material are categorised with a view to their speech act-indicating uses with the aid of a finite and interactional typology of speech acts.

The study will contribute to the extension of the empirical database for historical speech act studies (historical news discourse in Polish) and conventionalisation of speech act types. Methodologically, the paper tests the new theoretical approaches to speech acts (i.e. the concept of “altered speech acts”), confirms their applicability to historical data in different linguacultures and pursues potential sociocultural explanations which have so far not been complete.