

# Various facets of responsibility: the axiolinguistic perspective

## Summary

The Polish school of axiolinguistics draws inspiration from colloquial language, the philosophy of common sense (Moore 1903; 1912; Ossowska 1947; 1963; 1979; 1983), and utilises the accomplishments of the metaethics schools of thought, as well as cognitive linguistics that has been developing internationally for the last couple of decades. Axioinguistics is a relatively new field of research of an eclectic and interdisciplinary nature. Responsibility is always anchored in the social norms that a particular community abides by. In this work, I assume that the basic dynamics of PLUS-MINUS (Krzyszowski 1990; 1993; 1999; Lakoff, Johnson 1988; Tokarski 2014; Wawrzyniak 2016) constitute a vector that is built in any kind of schema and that the opposition PLUS-MINUS reflects a mindset (one of many) of a particular value system. Moreover, I also assume that the opposition RESPONSIBLE-IRRESPONSIBLE is a tool determining particular attitudes, ways of comprehending and experiencing responsibility. The axiological calibration of RESPONSIBLE-IRRESPONSIBLE takes on the form of a feature that can be acquired, i.e. *X is (not) responsible (for Z through S)*.

In Chapter One, I analyse the evaluation *X is responsible*: 1) *X is responsible* can be interpreted as an expression of the emotional reaction of the one who evaluates, i.e. it is an expression of moral feelings; 2) *X is responsible* pertains to the sphere of attitudes, e.g. the parent teaching the child not to do something (“because it’s bad”) expresses their condemnation for the particular deed as they try to make the child take on the same attitude as theirs; 3) when we say that P is responsible, in fact we recommend P to act; 4) in accordance with the hybrid concept of evaluation, *X is responsible* constitutes a logical conjunction that is composed of two elements: the first states that *X is responsible* (the subject of moral evaluation is “this or that”), the other element points to the author of the evaluation and their particular feelings towards it, their experience of (feeling of) responsibility. When we evaluate X as responsible, we do it on the basis of the socially accepted norms and rules of behaviour. Axioinguistic reflection emphasises the fact that communication occurs in contact with cultural and

moral actions, that cultural contexts constitute timeless axiological norms, and that humans create, construct and interpret socio-cultural reality by means of linguistic acts (Bartmiński 1990; 2003; 2006; 2007; Bartmiński, Tokarski 1986; Grzegorzczkova 1990; 1991; 1993; 1999; Lazari-Pawłowska 1975; Puzynina 1981; 1982; 1991; 1992; 1997; 2013; Tokarski 2014; Wierzbicka 1969; 1971).

In Chapter Two I present an identification of types of responsibility and an identification of the subject of the evaluative classification *X is responsible (for)*. This chapter includes axiosemantic and axiopragmatic investigations focused on the evaluation: *X is responsible (for (to))*. What is new in this book is the way issues of responsibility are interpreted in terms of *responsio*, *imputatio* and *periculum*, and also the theoretical-interpretative analysis of *responsio*, *imputatio* and *periculum* from two perspectives, retrospective and prospective. I analyse and discuss *retrospective responsibility*, which is understood as: guilt, defending/ justifying, shouldering the blame. Retrospective responsibility 1) *imputatio*, connected with guilt, refers to the acts of assigning and apportioning; 2) *responsio*, connected with: responding, defending, justifying and/or accusing, constitutes bringing an individual to justice (with the aim of imposing consequences); 3) *periculum*, connected with accepting (for somebody), for example, the blame, pointing towards acts of sacrifice (oneself for an idea, for others). This act of sacrifice, of shouldering the responsibility, not only entails responsibility for a deed which one did not commit, but also indicates an individual's readiness to take the blame from another upon oneself, or to take the punishment for another, e.g. for a greater idea or good in general. This means that such acts are a form of "carrying for another", the act of a hero or even a martyr.

In dealing with the issue of *prospective responsibility* I refer two phenomena: responsible actions and a sense of duty... *Imputatio* refers to the duties and future acts assigned to an individual; *responsio* refers to act of responding to a request, being approached or summoned; *periculum* is in essence an act of supererogation. This is a feeling of obligation. Prospective responsibility *periculum*, or "taking it upon oneself" refers to the future interests to be fulfilled that are imposed by an individual. This is a feeling of being duty-bound to supererogatory acts that are commonly praised or perceived as worth emulating, although such acts are recognised being obligatory, nor is every individual able to perform them. The distinguishing feature of supererogatory acts is their 'overresponsibility'. Responsibility *responsio* refers to future tasks, interests entrusted and acts of responding to requests. Responding to a call to respond simultaneously constitutes an act of taking responsibility *imputatio* and a duty to fulfil.

In Chapter Three I analyse responsibility in terms of relevance theory (Sperber, Wilson 1986/2001). The aim of the analysis is to provide an answer to: *If X is responsible, X is responsible; If X is responsible, X is guilty* and to provide an answer in various contexts to: *He is responsible; Is he responsible?; Please, be respon-*

*sible; Be responsible!; How responsibly; She is so responsible!*. I investigate the way the receiver resolves this ambiguity, how they select one of the many meanings ascribed to the word *responsible*. What is interesting in these pragmatic investigations is the discovery of the intention attributed to the speaker, but also in the case of speaking about responsibility, to grasp the norms of behaviour functioning in society which condition what is deemed appropriate to say, and socially sanctioned norms and values, and beliefs regarding responsible – appropriate/good behaviour.

In Chapter Four I discuss a pilot study questionnaire based on the preference for the common sense epistemology, which captures the common understating of particular meanings. In order to arrive at the commonly understood features that categorize an X as a responsible person I have applied the but-test, because-test and a test of free associations. The respondents were asked the following types of questions: 1a) *She is responsible, but...*; 1b) *He is responsible because...*; 2) Provide some expressions that would be synonymous with the word 'responsibility' 3) Provide some expressions that would be synonymous with the adjective 'irresponsible'; 4) Assuming that P stands for responsible, provide a description of a typical X that is P; 5) A responsible deed is the one where... The analysis of the common understanding of responsibility proves that this notion evokes multiple meanings. Based on this analysis it can be concluded that the notion of responsibility is built from the following elements: 1) the concept of guilt; 2) responding, defending against an accusation (and potential punishment); 3) a feeling of duty and commitments whose results serve the Other or the common good. The key dimensions of commonly understood responsibility are the following: conscientiousness, trustworthiness, maturity, the feeling of duty, prudence, reason, awareness (of the consequences), care, guilt and/or punishment.

The presentation of the images of responsibility is complemented in Chapter Five with information from dictionaries, which locate this notion within an established network of semantic correlations. This is also where I propose the characteristics for the dictionary entries of responsibility and responsible, rooted in the acts of experience and the conclusions of relevance theory. I have described ways of experiencing responsibility as determined by the following formula: X (the agent of responsibility) *is responsible for* Y (the object of responsibility), pointing out that If X is responsible (for Y = deed) then X desires/does Z. In the case of a negative experience of responsibility for the deed, X: escapes from responsibility, gives up on it, avoids it, finds ways out of it, transfers it, shakes it off, dilutes it, disperse it, gets rid of it, is afraid of it, carries the burden, experiences it, attributes it to somebody, places it on somebody, incriminates it on somebody. In the case of positive experiencing of responsibility for a deed X: accepts it, undertakes it, takes it, feels responsible for something, acknowledges

it... If the object of responsibility is a person, then in the case of the positive experience of responsibility the X desires to: learn the responsibility, share it, demonstrate it, bear it, accept it, take it, feels it. Moreover, *If X is responsible for a deed* then W (the executor of responsibility) desires to: make X accountable for it, burden, punish X, establish/specify, introduce, exacerbate, saddle, impose, assert, demand, pronounce. In the situation where X is not responsible then W: frees, lifts, limits, mitigates, lessens, exempts from responsibility.

In the final chapter I describe responsibility in terms of the possible symbols for experiencing it. I distinguish three different forms: being the scapegoat, being the shepherd, being the master. The discussion draws attention to the different ways of experiencing responsibility associated with the symbol: guilt, concern and causative power. I have distinguished: disburdening oneself of responsibility by blaming others; disburdening oneself of responsibility by blaming an impersonal 'something' or evoking another, Heideggerian 'being in self'; disburdening through rejecting, or lack of responsibility after death (and lack of moral responsibility while alive). I discuss three linguistic acts of neutralization. I distinguish several forms of disburdening (oneself of) responsibility: 1) avoiding first-person singular forms: *In those days different things were done...; It was decided that...; It somehow turned out...;* 2) indicating reflexive forms or attributing intentional actions to inanimate objects: *The tea's got spilled; The train's gone;* 3) blurring responsibility: *Really, everybody wanted it; It's alright;* 4) negating or using opposing constructions: *That's not true. It's their fault; I wasn't myself; To przecież nie ja;* 5) introjection: *I had to do it; It was stronger than me;* 6) projection: *That was because of them; I'm not like that;* 7) impersonal agency: *It was because of the surface;* 8) indicating others / guilty parties: *It's them; It was because of him.* The chapter closes with reflections on diffusion of responsibility based on data from the Axio Speech corpus.

In my book *Various facets of responsibility: the axiolinguistic perspective*, on the one hand, I construct a theoretical framework for the title concept, and on the other, I introduce concepts, ways of using and understanding responsibility and how it functions, as well as the evaluatory response *X is responsible* from both the prospective and retrospective angle. The 'hodgegenic' thought, which accompanies reflection, emphasises the fact that we learn responsibility within the family, school, and society, and it is in these environments that we experience it in both positive and negative ways, as guilt, duty to perform, and being accountable for something and to somebody. The amount of care, concern and natural responsibility is an archetype of all responsibility, and constitute capital for the individual – capital for their future responsible behaviour and attitudes.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*