

Summary

SURPRISE. A Pragmalinguistic Study (Based on Polish, Russian and English Language Material)

The analysis presented in this monograph has made it possible to identify a range of pragmatic and linguistic characteristics associated with the expression of surprise in Polish, Russian, and English. In particular, the study discusses lexical and phraseological strategies for conceptualizing the state of surprise, as well as lexical, phrasematic, prosodic, and syntactic markers of the surprise function. Additionally, we have outlined the structural patterns of surprise utterances in the languages under investigation.

To achieve these research objectives, approximately 2,000 utterances expressing surprise were extracted from prose works in each of the three languages. To a minimal extent, the analysis also incorporated spontaneous utterances overheard in public places in authentic communicative contexts. In the case of excerpts drawn from literary prose, the selection criterion was the highest possible degree of similarity between the utterances and naturally occurring spoken language. The process of identifying surprise utterances in prose involved examining narrative comments situated in close proximity to direct speech segments, with particular attention to the presence of verbs denoting emotion and their derivatives belonging to the semantic field of surprise – such as *zdziwić się*, *zdumiony*, *zaskoczenie*, *osłupiały* (Polish); *удивиться*, *изумление*, *поразить* (Russian); and *surprise*, *astonish*, *amazement* (English). This methodological approach enabled the inclusion of only those utterances whose intended function – as expressions of surprise – was explicitly confirmed by the authorial narrative. By applying this criterion, utterances that might have been classified as acts of surprise solely on the basis of the reader's linguistic or pragmatic intuition were deliberately excluded. This decision was intended to minimize the risk of interpretative error, particularly given the well-documented tendency in literature for formally similar emotional utterances to convey divergent affective meanings.

In this monograph, the concept of surprise is employed to denote a range of emotions within the broader category of surprise, including amazement, stupefaction, bewilderment, and shock. Despite differences among these emotional states – particularly in terms of their intensity and the semantic nuances of their respective linguistic labels – no pragmatic or formal linguistic distinctions were identified in the utterances analyzed. The observed differences appear to concern primarily the degree of emotional intensity, rather than their structural or functional realization in discourse. For the purposes of this study, surprise is defined as a short-lived, non-prototypical emotion, typically structured according to a stimulus–response–interpretation schema. It is neutral in valence, meaning that it cannot be unequivocally categorized as either positive or negative, and is triggered by a disruption of the experiencer's certainties, beliefs, or expectations – whether caused by a personal or

impersonal agent, or more broadly, by new environmental input. A surprise utterance is understood as a reactive speech act in which the speaker evaluates the object of surprise as incompatible with previously held certainties, beliefs, or expectations, while expressing a neutral stance toward that discrepancy. This can be explicated as follows: *I am certain / am convinced / expect that it is not (p); I assess (p) as inconsistent with the certainty / belief / expectation that it is not (p); I adopt a neutral attitude toward the violation of my certainty / belief / expectation by (p)*. This conceptualization reveals the dual character of surprise: it is, on the one hand, epistemic in nature – rooted in the subject's cognitive framework and assumptions about a particular state of affairs; on the other hand, it constitutes an emotional reaction that is affectively neutral yet may subsequently give rise to further emotional responses, which may reflect either a positive or negative evaluative judgment and corresponding affective orientation toward the surprising stimulus. A distinction is maintained in this study between the function of surprise, as realized in discourse, and the emotion of surprise as internally experienced. The interactional sense of surprise does not necessarily entail a connection with “real” internal affective states. It may be more closely related to self-presentation and have a strategic, persuasive, and interactional character.

The present monograph addresses key issues within the fields of pragmalinguistics and speech act theory, which form the theoretical and methodological foundation of the study. It also offers a comprehensive overview of existing reflections on the concept of surprise from philosophical, psychological, neurobiological, pedagogical, and linguistic perspectives, with particular emphasis on research conducted within Polish-, Russian-, and English-language contexts.

Drawing on lexicographic analysis, the study identifies and describes the lexical, phraseological, phrasematic, and prosodic-syntactic markers of surprise in Polish, Russian, and English. It is established that the primary lexical means used to name or report the experience of surprise and related emotions in the analyzed languages include nouns (e.g., *zdziwienie, osłupienie, amazement, astonishment, поражение, изумление*) and verbs (e.g., *zdziwić się, surprise (be surprised), удивиться, zdumieć się, osłupieć, be amazed, be astonished, изумиться, поразиться*), as well as word forms sharing a morphological base with these lexical items. The study also delineates the lexical-semantic field of surprise in the examined languages, including terms which label phenomena, individuals, and objects that evoke surprise. Examples include: Polish – *numer, cyrk, cudactwo, niewiarygodny, niespodzianie*; Russian – *внезапный, необычный, необыкновенно*; and English – *surprising, astounding, dumbfoundingly, kicker, eye-opener*. In addition, metaphorical expressions representing the physiological and psychological symptoms of surprise are analyzed, such as: *oniemieć, osłupieć, zdębieć, znieruchomieć, skamienieć, одеревенеть, застыть, окостенеть, earth-shaking, breathtaking, jaw-droppingly, spadać jak grom z jasnego nieba, stanąć jak wryty, robić wielkie oczy, nie wierzyć własnym uszom, глазам не верить, вытаращить глаза, как (точно, будто) обухом по голове (ударить), a bolt from/out of the blue, stop dead in one's tracks, rooted to the spot*. A comparative analysis of phraseological expressions related to surprise suggests that the languages under study share a common conceptualization of surprise as an electric-like force that causes a sudden cessation of action, often accompanied by characteristic physiological, expressive, and behavioral reactions. The study identifies both shared and language-specific ways of representing these conceptualizations. Ultimately,

the findings shed light on culturally embedded, naïve representations of the state of surprise across the studied languages.

A key component of this study is the comprehensive analysis of the prosodic, syntactic, lexical, and phrasematic markers of surprise. The intonational features of surprise-related utterances are examined in detail, including the use of falling intonation in exclamations and *wh*-questions, and rising intonation in *yes/no* questions in English and Polish. The study also discusses the specific intonational patterns employed in Russian to express surprise. In addition to prosodic features, the analysis identifies dependent operators – i.e., lexical items capable of expressing surprise – as well as independent operators, which are grammatically and formally inflexible multi-word constructions typically realized as fixed, reproducible phrases with interactional functions. It is demonstrated that independent operators may take the form of exclamations, sentence phrases, verb phrases, exclamatory expressions, or expletive-like verbs. Lexicographic analysis further reveals that most of these operators are multifunctional in terms of their emotive content. That is, in addition to surprise, they may also convey other emotional meanings such as fear, indignation, impatience, or more broadly, emotional agitation. Their pragmatic value is context-dependent and becomes actualized in specific communicative situations.

By conceptualizing surprise as a speech act – that is, a communicative act conveying a specific intention – it was possible to identify a range of pragmatic and linguistic features associated with this verbal phenomenon. However, the classification of the speech act type represented by such utterances proved to be complex. Drawing on the distinction between propositional and interactional content, commonly made in the literature, this study posits that in the analyzed utterances, surprise functions as an interactional component rather than belonging to the propositional content of the utterance. In the utterances analyzed, the assertive component reports a particular fact that elicits the speaker's surprise (*p*), or signals this fact linguistically, while the interactional component expresses the speaker's surprise that (*p*). This dual structure is characteristic of surprise utterances, regardless of their formal linguistic realization. It applies equally to assertive constructions, various types of interrogatives, and interjections.

The study also investigated the pragmatic functions performed by surprise utterances and the utterances that accompany them within broader utterance complexes. The analysis revealed that the function of expressing surprise is closely associated with modal-syntagmatic functions, primarily those of interrogation, but also those involving confirmation, acceptance, negation, denial, and the avoidance of modal judgments. The findings suggest that this association provides further evidence of the epistemic nature of surprise, which is intrinsically linked to the speaker's pursuit of knowledge and often serves as a component of broader problem-solving discourse.

A significant number of surprise utterances simultaneously perform additional emotive functions related to the object of surprise. These include the expression of positive or negative evaluations and attitudes directed toward various participants or elements of the discourse – such as the speaker, the recipient, a third party, or states of affairs associated with any of these entities. Emotions expressed in these contexts may include self-satisfaction, self-pity, remorse, delight, pride, admiration, dissatisfaction, or resentment toward the interlocutor or their critical remarks.

Less frequently, surprise responses perform directive or action-oriented functions. Typically, these are illocutionary acts that appear in the immediate context of surprise expressions, forming part of more complex utterance structures that function as prohibitions, suggestions, warnings, proposals, or requests. Instances of modal functions expressing doubt were also identified, though such examples are relatively rare.

Notably, the function of counter-argumentation is observed with relative frequency within sequences that include surprise utterances. This function is usually realized through utterances that follow the initial expression of surprise – whether in the form of exclamations or questions – and serve to challenge or oppose the information previously provided by the interlocutor. These counterarguments typically reflect the speaker's divergent beliefs, expectations, or certainties. Additionally, the function of expressing surprise may co-occur with that of irony, particularly in utterances aimed at highlighting the absurdity of the interlocutor's message. In such instances, the expression of surprise may also serve strategic purposes, such as concealing one's true motives, dissuading the interlocutor from a course of action, or deflecting responsibility for one's own errors.

The analysis further demonstrated that surprise utterances are highly context-dependent, closely tied to both preceding and subsequent utterances within the dialogic exchange. This positions them as continuative responses that contribute to the implementation of various conversational strategies, including informational-verifying, axiological-emotive, behavioral, and metadiscursive strategies. The most frequently observed surprise utterances occur as part of non-antagonistic informational-verifying strategies, where they function to elicit information presumed to be held in the interlocutor's working memory, thereby reinforcing the speaker's intention to acquire new knowledge. Surprise utterances are also commonly employed within metadiscursive strategies, where they serve primarily a clarificatory role or provide metatextual evaluations of the interlocutor's preceding utterances. Utterances functioning as components of axiological-emotive strategies, aimed at reaching consensus between interlocutors concerning value judgments about specific states of affairs, are less frequently represented in the empirical material. In such cases, a surprise utterance typically serves as a prelude to expressing a viewpoint that diverges from that of the interlocutor, thereby initiating a further exchange of perspectives between the partners. Surprise utterances are also rarely employed in the implementation of behavioral strategies, including those directed at modifying the interlocutor's behavior. More commonly, the sense of surprise accompanies reactions to the behavioral strategies employed by the interlocutor toward the speaker and, in practice, functions as part of an informational-verifying strategy, wherein the speaker seeks to uncover the underlying rationale for the interlocutor's prior utterance.

The study further revealed a variety of conversational tactics employed when surprise is expressed. These tactics may be broadly categorized as serving to intensify, attenuate, modify, or expand the pragmatic function of the response. Tactics of intensification primarily aim to increase the emotional salience of the utterance. They often contribute to its ritualization, as the use of formulaic linguistic structures commonly associated with the expression of surprise facilitates the interpretation of the speaker's intention by the recipient. In instances of modification, multiple emotive functions may be layered within a single utterance – particularly when the cause of surprise simultaneously evokes a clearly positive or negative emotional response. Conversely, tactics aimed at attenuating the emotive content of the utterance are rare. The deployment of such tactics is often automatic and subconscious,

shaped more by the specific communicative context or the speaker's individual linguistic habits than by cross-linguistic differences. The speaker's level of emotional arousal at the moment of speech may also play a significant role in determining the choice of tactic.

Regarding the structural organization of the analyzed responses, they may generally be divided into single-utterance and multi-utterance forms. Among single-utterance responses, interrogative constructions are the most prevalent, followed by declarative utterances, with interjections appearing less frequently. In contrast, multi-utterance complexes often follow a patterned structure, typically beginning with a brief, initiating question, followed by one or more explanatory questions that are more specific in terms of propositional content. These may also be accompanied by declarative utterances, which most often serve to clarify the source or cause of the speaker's surprise. This structural approach is particularly useful when an isolated utterance fails to clearly convey the pragmatic function of surprise, thereby risking misinterpretation by the recipient. Consequently, such utterances are frequently supplemented with additional utterances that specify the object of surprise and sustain the interactional relevance of the surprise expression.

It must be emphasized, however, that the observed patterns do not admit a single uniform explanation. Both short, single-component utterances and longer, multi-utterance forms are contingent upon varying communicative contexts, differing levels of emotional intensity, the speaker's temperament, and the degree of (a)symmetry in the relationship between the interlocutors. Quantitative data derived from the analysis of the empirical material suggest that the distribution of structural types capable of expressing surprise is relatively consistent across the three analyzed languages. This observation may indicate a degree of universality in the formal realization of surprise expressions. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the study was confined to only three Indo-European languages. To obtain more generalizable results, and to confirm or challenge the hypothesis regarding the universality of the identified structural patterns, analogous research should be extended to include a broader typological range of languages.

Overall, the study demonstrates that a pragmatic-linguistic approach can be instrumental in addressing several key issues related to the nature and properties of surprise. The analysis of surprise utterances – despite the clear methodological distinction between the analysis of pragmatic functions (which are inherently social, interactive, and discursive in nature) and the internal emotional states to which the linguist has no direct access – provides support, at the pragmatic-linguistic level, for the claim that surprise is affectively neutral, and that the information it conveys is primarily metacognitive in character. The findings also appear to corroborate R. Reisenzein's hypothesis that feelings of pleasure or displeasure occurring either concurrently with or subsequent to surprise should be considered independent emotional reactions, emerging from a cognitive mechanism that compares newly acquired beliefs with pre-existing mental representations. According to this model, pleasure results from the congruence between new beliefs and prior desires, while displeasure results from their incongruence. Furthermore, the study confirms the widely held view that surprise contributes to the formation of complex emotions, as in many instances the analyzed utterances simultaneously perform multiple emotive functions. It also provides empirical support for the theoretical model in which the surprise utterance follows a tripartite scenario: stimulus – response – interpretation. Only after a verbal reaction expressing surprise does the interpretative phase occur, involving an evaluation of the stimulus and the

expression of the speaker's attitude toward it. This pattern is particularly evident in complex utterances, where an initial signal of surprise is followed by expressions of either positive or negative emotion triggered by the interpretation of the stimulus. This observation aligns with A.J. Bochkarev's view that emotional experience involves implication, namely that the occurrence of surprise conditions the emergence of subsequent emotions.

These findings open promising avenues for further research. One potential direction would involve expanding the analysis to include a broader range of spoken data, particularly material obtained through participant observation or naturalistic recordings. This would enable a more nuanced characterization of intonational markers associated with different types of utterances that realize the pragmatic function of surprise. Similarly, extending the temporal scope of the analysis to include texts published in earlier periods might uncover historically specific surprise operators reflective of different developmental stages in the evolution of the studied languages. Additionally, and as previously noted, future studies may encompass a wider range of languages, including non-Indo-European language families, which could help identify linguistic universals in the expression of surprise, as well as revealing culture-specific patterns characteristic of linguistic communities outside the Indo-European sphere. The claims regarding the conceptualization of surprise in different linguistic and cultural contexts, while plausible, also require empirical validation based on representative corpora. These include, for example, the hypothesis that speakers of English typically adopt a rational, analytical orientation toward surprise – evidenced by active attempts to explain its causes – whereas Russian speakers are characterized by a more contemplative, passive attitude. Another claim requiring verification is the presumed stronger association between surprise and fear in Russian, and between surprise and delight in English. Finally, the methodology and findings presented in this study may serve as a model for pragmatic-linguistic analyses of the realization of other emotive functions in discourse, extending beyond the domain of surprise. Emotional-cognitive states that are similarly neutral in valence, such as curiosity, intrigue, or disorientation, appear particularly promising as subjects of further investigation.