

“Egocentricity” of syntactical structures in English

The object of this investigation is the syntactical structures, which are oriented to the speaker, who uses the word “I” to refer to himself, and who correlates everything with his point of view. The function of pointing or specifying from the perspective of a participant in an act of speech or writing is called deixis. The lexical expressions and grammatical structures, which perform this function, are called differently by linguists: deictic, indexical, egocentric, etc.

Deixis is one of the main topics in Pragmatics. Its central problem is that sentence meaning vastly underdetermines speaker’s meaning, and as a result, its goal is to explain how the gap between sentence meaning and speaker’s meaning is bridged.

The “egocentricity” may be explicitly expressed, first of all, through the lexical meaning of those words, which are the constituent elements of the analyzed syntactic units: phrases and sentences: *Can I [Rosemary] help you /Fitzgerald/*. The dictionary entries of “I” and “you” reveal their indexicality: I - used by a speaker /writer to refer to himself; you – the person/s/ addressed.

The explicit “egocentricity” is also provided by some grammatical meanings of the verb-predicate. The grammatical category of “mood” expresses the relation of an utterance to reality from the speaker’s point of view. For, example, the Imperative mood is used to tell or ask the listener/s/ what to do, i.e. denotes an action, which hasn’t been done yet, but which is urged, encouraged, suggested, advised, asked by the speaker: *Speak English*.

The category of person of English verbs also deals with deixis. It serves to present an action as associated by the speaking person with himself /or a group of persons including the speaker/, the person or persons addressed, and the person or thing /persons or things/ not participating in the process of speech: am – are - is.

A special attention must be paid to modal phrases made by modal verbs in combination with infinitives. The lexico-grammatical meaning of the modal verbs is “egocentric” by its nature. It conveys a wide range of peculiarities of the speaker’s attitude towards the action expressed by the infinitive. The speaker informs of possibility, necessity, etc. of the action /the informative usages/, indicates his/her conclusion /the inferential usages/ or tries to make the speaker to do something by advising, permitting, prohibiting, etc /the imperative usages/.

Among widely used “egocentric” phrases are also: **get + P2** having a reflexive meaning, which is used when we talk about things that we “do to ourselves” /get dressed/; **get+object + P2**, which may mean “arrange for something to be done by somebody else”/I got my hair cut yesterday/ or “to talk about things that happen to us”/I got my car stolen yesterday/.

Besides ‘egocentricity’ explicitly expressed by words, word forms and phrases, there is “invisible”, implicit “egocentricity” /indexicality/. By the very fact of being uttered, the utterance indexes a person who utters. For example, the speech act of “promise” presupposes implicitly the existence of the speaker who promises something to someone.

The analysis of explicit and implicit ‘egocentricity’ of syntactical structures contributes to the study of those aspects of communication whose interpretation depends on knowledge of the context in which the communication occurs.

Registration Form

I hereby register for USSE 3
3rd Ukrainian Society for the Study of English Symposium,
6-8 October 2005, Kiev, Ukraine

Name:	Liudmyla Kotniuk
Institution:	Zhytomyr State University
Address:	maidan Korolenka, 3, Apt. 68 Zhytomyr, Ukraine, 10003
e-mail	liudmylakotniuk@yahoo.co.uk
Phone:	8 /0412/ 22-25-20