

Language mask as a tool for linguistic analyses

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The paper proposes the concept of a language mask as a tool for analysing texts and discourse. The key element of masking is simultaneous concealing and revealing of the content, by selecting aspects to be shown and those to be hidden, which enables manipulating the expressed message. Language masks, that is, linguistic tools serving to pretend (e.g. metaphor, hyperbole), are treated as meta-tools in communication, mediators that modify the cognitive structure (and thus, often the axiological charge and emotional connotations) of the content by profiling it so that, for example, the message appears more attractive. The concept of a language mask may be used as an independent tool of analysis, but may also be related and combined with various existing approaches and methodologies of linguistic analysis, such as politeness theory, mitigation, image management, also in political linguistics, translation studies and other semantic-pragmatic, especially cognitive, sociolinguistic and text/discourse-analytic tools.

Keywords: *language masks, pragmatics, cognitive semantics, discourse analysis, image management*

1 Introduction: Language masks for difficult topics

It is obvious that the ways we view – or are able to view – reality differ from person to person. “The same thing” may always be presented in various ways, depending on the viewpoint and the feature one focuses on. Values, emotions and needs are the key aspects of power and manipulation in language.

The paper proposes the concept of a language mask for analysing texts and discourse. Based on the cognitive view that our language reveals our mental, cultural and behavioural phenomena, a language mask is seen here as a strategy, a powerful semantic-pragmatic tool that pretends, entertains and protects – thanks to its dual nature: on the one hand it conceals a given reality, but on the other hand it reveals it, profiling the content. Masks also have the potential to influence the valuing and emotional connotations of the masked. Language masks are linguistic tools used for pretending. They especially appear when dealing with controversial, difficult and taboo concepts, like any political or historical controversies¹, religion, possession, censorship (Biela-Wołośńciej 2011a), social taboos, such as death (Biela-Wołośńciej 2009c, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d) and physiological functions like sex, excretion, etc. In the public sphere, an opinion poll may have totally different results depending on the way the key concept is presented (and potentially masked) and on the emotional-axiological aspects of the selected expressions.

2 What are masks?

In linguistics, the term *mask* is used sporadically and does not seem to function as a set concept, apart from the proposal presented here. However, in other disciplines related to

¹ A summary of the present paper, focusing on political discourse analysis, was accepted for the T2PP (“From Text to Political Positions”) Workshop, 9-10 April 2010, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

the study of language, *mask* is an established element of their set of concepts. Of special relevance are: ethnology and cultural anthropology, psychology and sociology. These approaches focus on different aspects, but remain complementary.

2.1 *Mask in disciplines related to linguistics*

In cultural anthropology, *mask* refers not only to covering the face, but a general transformation of one's appearance – the clothes, makeup, hairstyle, props and one's whole behaviour. Masks rather show than hide. The key notion here is creating a relation, meeting the Other (the dead, gods, oneself). The mask is a symbolic mediator between the material world of humans and the immaterial world of spirits. The latter ones visit the mask wearer, and the mask becomes an embodiment of an unearthly being, and functions as its/his/her metaphor, a physical expression of the immaterial – expresses what is beyond words. Various masks are used for calling spirits, protecting from unwanted ones and scaring away evil ones (Kerényi 2005). There are also death masks that copy the face or body in order to magically or symbolically provide it immortality (Maertens 2005). The concept of a mask is strictly connected with ritual, the sacrum sphere, taboo and trance that the wearers enter. In the theatre, masks express archetypes. In carnival, they enable to express emotions and attitudes (e.g. Noh festival). At funerals, they help the dead find their way to the world beyond (Egypt, China, Africa) (Janion and Rosiek 1986). Many masks, inherited from generation to generation, are connected with local myths, worshipped as objects of cult (Lévi-Strauss 1985) and belong to key artefacts of many cultures. However, in the modern society, especially western, art has separated itself from ritual, masks as objects became “desemanticised”, and entered the domain of folklore, thus losing its sacral and magic aspect. Maertens (2005) notes that they have become a secondary sign: the mask, itself a sign, becomes a sign of the sign it originally was.

The contemporary European mask stems from the Greek cult of Dionysus, connected with sacred sites in the nature, where masks were hung, and is also related to the spirits of the dead and the state of insanity, especially if referring to the processions of masked dancers. Another origin of the contemporary mask is the horrifying mask of Gorgon (Kerényi 2005). The theatre mask, whose prototype probably appeared with the Dionysus dancers, enables such a transformation that the wearer is simultaneously him/herself and someone else.² Masks of this type have been preserved and still exist in street theatre (clowns), pantomime (as makeup) and carnival-type of entertainment (street parades, fancy dress balls) (Nyczek 2002). Dressing up as someone else, for example at carnival (such as using carnival masks of the dell'arte comedy type) has two communicative functions: detaching from oneself and symbolically gaining a new, different identity, which provides anonymity and the ability to ignore norms and social conventions (Boholm 2005). The mask in culture may also be considered as an aspect of the semiotics of identity, where in an iconic or indexical way the mask may be seen to reveal or conceals one's identity (Pollock 1995). Altogether, in cultural anthropology, the mask not as much connotes hiding or deceiving, but it is often a “hush from a different world” (Nyczek 2002) used to express the inexpressible, protect, transform a person and/or identity, reveal and encounter. Similar aspects may be seen as present in the concept of a language mask, for example when talking about abstract or difficult things.

² *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*. ed. Dennis Kennedy. Vol.2. OUP, 2003: 813-814.

In sociology, the Machiavellian concepts of *mask* and *masking* are mostly associated with symbolic interactionism and the microsociological approach of Goffman, based on the metaphor of a theatre performance – an idea inspired by the notion of playing roles by G.H. Mead. To Goffman (1959), everyone, when in a social situation (in the company of others), behaves like an actor on stage. The mask is a synonym of *role* (or: *front*), of which everyone has many types and constantly chooses the one most appropriate to the given situation, using various strategies of selection to make the best possible impression on observers in the interaction (*strategic interaction*). Masking means selecting those aspects of oneself which one temporarily wishes to expose (such as concealing egoism, being polite). The person chooses the manner of moving, speaking, appearance, props and “stage design”, and hides secrets (Goffman distinguishes various types of secrets: dark, strategic, and intra-group ones) whose revealing might harm the image one wishes to make on the environment. The situation of playing a role and all actions in the presence of others are called a *performance*, defined as: *all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers* (Goffman 1959: 22). In every social situation one wishes to create a desired image of oneself (*impression management*) – using *defensive techniques* (controlling one’s emotions) and *protective techniques* (trusting the audience that they will tactfully ignore any failures of the “actor”). The person playing a given role on the one hand must be immersed in it, in order to be convincing, and on the other hand must be alert and react to any disturbances. To Goffman, we often identify persons with their roles and take the mask for the actual person – which is a result, but not the reason for performing roles. His approach is often associated with the concept of the modern game theory. The mask, seen as “the social self,” is also interpreted as the place where one’s personality is revealed (St.Clair 2003). Altogether, in sociology *the mask* means the role of a person played in front of others. This approach is related to the politeness theory in linguistics, and obviously to the concept of language mask as a tool of image management and profiling.

The term *mask* in psychology is quite established, and was originally introduced by C.G. Jung. To him and his successors in psychoanalysis, the mask, i.e. *persona*, belongs to the basic elements of the human psyche, alongside with *self*, *shadow*, *anima/animus*, *imago dei*, etc. The mask is the psychophysical attitude, one’s whole public personality, “the social self”: *Die Persona ist ein kompliziertes Beziehungssystem zwischen dem individuellen Bewusstsein und der Sozietät, passenderweise eine art Maske, welche einerseits darauf berechnet ist, einen bestimmten Eindruck auf die anderen zu machen, andererseits die wahre Natur des Individuums zu verdecken.*³ (Jung 1971: 260). It might be called an “interface”, as it is a mediator between the human inner world and the external world. The mask entails both the appearance and one’s behaviour. Psychology also points to the opposition between the one’s *persona* and the true face (*das wahre Gesicht*) (Jung 1971), for the mask may cause a tension. It may also mislead others about the wearer’s personality. However, the mask also possesses a function of protecting the most vulnerable, and may thus be beneficial (Płużek 1991). The mask is expressed in roles and social customs, and it is an inevitable element of an individual’s functioning in a society (Pervin 1993). Like the skin on the body – it has a regulating role, but to work properly, it must be flexible. If the mask is not flexible enough, it disturbs one’s functioning. If it is too strong, it poses a threat to one’s

³ The *persona* is a complicated system of relations between the individual consciousness and the society, like a type of a mask, which one the one hand aims to make a certain impression of others, and on the other hand to conceal the individual’s true nature. [own transl.]

personality, as it may falsify or dominate it (Jacobi 1993). The mask may also be used to “make up” for one’s inabilities, often on the contrary (so that e.g. a shy person appears very self-confident) (Płużek 1991). As the mask is not merely about pretending, but also about shaping and transforming personality, it may be used purposefully to modify behaviours or practise desired attitudes – consciously or not, e.g. by therapeutic metaphor-stories, psychodrama, NLP and other techniques (O’Connor and Seymour 1996). In social psychology, the mask is a strategic tool of creating one’s an image in social interactions. This image – although is not quite reality – is also not possible to be separated from reality (Scheibe 1979). Hence, the main function of the mask in psychology is a necessary mediator serving to express, transform and create an image for oneself and for others – which is corresponding to the roles of a language mask.

2.2 *Mask in linguistics*

The term *mask* appears sporadically in linguistic studies and is used in a narrow sense, mainly referring to various forms of manipulation using euphemisms, as in Dąbrowska (1999), who treats it as a protective mask “in bad intention” (of type 2 in the typology below, similarly to the approach in the sociopolitical analyses by Karwat 2006). Caffi (2007) does not use the term, but in her discourse-analytic approach she discusses certain aspects of masking as *mitigation* (“doing and undoing”). In literature studies, name-masks, used by Szargot (1993) refer to the various names a Romanticism author uses to sign his works and letters. Jakubów analyses the mask of satire (2005) discussed in relation to political censorship in the GDR – which the present comprehensive approach to masks in language would classify as a protective and social mask. The proposed approach is broader and entails the above ones.

The central feature of masking is the selection of aspects one decides to show, as opposed to those to be hidden – which enables manipulating the expressed message. The cognitive approach to language views it as a tool of the mind that is also used to understand reality, for example to categorise. One of the basic aspects of categorisation is the axiological one. Because masks are meta-tools in communication, mediators, and present selected aspects of a given concept, they may also modify the axiological charge of the content, i.e. profile it so that a concept with a basic negative valuing is presented as a more positive one. Their essence is intentional profiling of the message by pretending, that is, revealing and concealing. The content is expressed indirectly, as if it was wrapped in a protective or modifying layer.

A mask in language may be seen as a type of a sign (such as a word or expression) where the signified is intentionally profiled – in the sense of profiling by Bartmiński (2007) and Langacker (1995) – depending on the perspective and will of the user. Certain aspects (elements) of meaning are concealed, while other ones are selected to be revealed or stressed in the signifier. This relation may also be treated with reference to categories as trajector-landmark, profile-base and figure-ground distinction, construal, viewpoint, vantage and other approaches.

As a profiling tool, the mask also has the power to suggest certain valuing of the expressed concept. The sender has the intention to hide certain aspects, and to show other ones – consciously or not. Obviously, not every use of potentially masking language tools, e.g. metaphor or periphrasis, is masking – only when the sender has an intention to conceal a part of what is expressed, and expose another part. Language masks – as any masks – have a dual function: they reveal and conceal, but one of these functions may be dominant.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the concept of mask is also related to the taboo sphere and involves prohibitions in the domains of sacrum, profanum and threat. A language taboo is a language form or expression avoided in a given group, and “forbidden words”, i.e. the names of taboo concepts and their homophones, are avoided and masked with substitutions (e.g. *toilet - powder room, restroom, lavatory, WC, ladies’/men’s room, bathroom*).⁴ In the language of politics and the media, politeness and political correctness are strong factors which cause the masking of taboo concepts. According to the rule of iconicity in language, if a mask appears as a mediator in communication, the distance between the signified and the signifier grows, and the link between them is loosened. Words may then act as barriers that separate the interlocutors from the content of the conversation. This may lead to language change, where the *signifiant* shifts so far away from its primary *signifié* that as a result it only refers to its metaphoric extension, e.g. that the word ‘death’ (and thus, the concept of death) mostly refers to an end of something in an abstract sense (e.g. ‘dead batteries’), and when referring to “real” death of a human being other expressions are used, e.g. ‘passing’. In other words, often when one means an end in an abstract sense, one says ‘death’, but when one means human death, one rather says ‘passing away’. (Biela 2001)

A mask (in language and in the physical world) creates a double-sided barrier, as it may conceal both the content (e.g. a sacrum) from the external world, and the external world from the content (e.g. protect from the threat it poses). Masks have the potential to both conceal and reveal, disable and enable, disturb and facilitate, zoom out and zoom in, cause distance and create intimacy – often simultaneously. (Biela-Wołośńiej 2008, 2009a, 2009c, 2012). They are used in different contexts, and for various reasons: emotional (to cope with feelings and protect the vulnerable), social (politeness), manipulative (to persuade, transform reality, impose opinions and values), cognitive (to express more effectively the complicated or abstract), relevance (to expose the most relevant elements).

3 Types of masks in language and culture

Masks in language and culture may be divided into types according to their function. For illustration, each type may be assigned a prototype from the physical world. The functional typology of masks in language and culture, proposed in Polish by Biela-Wołośńiej (2011a, 2011b) and in English by Biela-Wołośńiej (2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012) and Biela-Wołośńiej and Fornalczyk (2012), is shown in Table 1.

⁴ An example of a strong social taboo, present in both private and public life, is the avoidance of homophones of ‘death’ in Mandarin Chinese (‘si’), including the numeral ‘four’ and its multiples (also in sums of money, floors in buildings, car license plates, public discourse and business figures). (Biela-Wołośńiej 2012)

Table 1. Functional typology of masks in language and culture and their prototypes in the physical world

Mask type	Function		<i>Physical world prototype</i>	<i>Examples in language</i>
1. protective masks in “good intention”	protect, work for the benefit of the:	a) wearer (sender): protect them from external threats	<i>gas mask</i>	<i>I wasn't satisfied (litotes) / one is excited (impersonal form) – euphemistic, not to reveal one's emotions</i>
		b) the other party (receiver): protect them from the threat of the wearer/message	<i>surgeon's mask</i>	<i>passed away (metaphor) these things will soon end (index-phrase) / your English is not the best (understatement) – all euphemistic, for politeness</i>
2. protective masks in “bad intention”	protect the wearer, enable to act against the other party, being unidentified and not taking responsibility for one's actions or intentions:	a) conceal the wearer	<i>thief mask</i>	<i>It has been stolen (impersonal form not to reveal the agent) / you know what I mean (“riddle”) to gain trust and confuse</i>
		b) mislead the other party	<i>wolf in a sheep's skin</i>	<i>ecological leather (circumlocution), suggesting natural material / and I won't mention his love affairs (apophasis) - revealing, yet suggesting discretion</i>
3. social masks	concealing enables to disobey norms and social rules, provides entertainment or freedom of expression without taking responsibility for it		<i>carnival mask</i>	<i>you fool!.. just kidding! (hyperbole irony) – humor to avoid responsibility</i>

4. mediating masks	enable an invisible spirit or abstract concept become physically accessible, express the inexpressible	<i>ritual mask</i>	<i>the bumpy road of our relationship</i> (metaphor) for an abstract reality
5. depicting masks	copy reality (a person's face when alive or dead), create a lookalike, and potentially make it immortal	<i>death/ life mask</i>	<i>beautiful, pretty</i> (close synonyms)
6. exaggerating masks	express the characteristic features of the face which are relevant in a given context, symbolically strengthen the message, simplify perception	<i>theatre mask</i>	<i>he became worm buffet</i> (metonymy, hyper-bole) – to stress the tragic aspects

The division in Table 1 shows the potential functions of masks, however, a single instance of masking often performs several functions at once. For example, many masks are a combination of a protective function alongside with an exaggerating, mediating or social one.

The most commonly used masks are: *protective* (as a politeness strategy or to mislead and overcome potential resistance), *exaggerating* a (“mental shortcut”) and *social* (humour, play) – often combined, e.g. when the speaker wishes to avoid responsibility for the message expressed. Undoubtedly, difficult issues and concepts, and thus, words that express them, often masking ones, require much more mental effort than “ordinary” ones, which is also revealed in typical patterns of verbal-nonverbal behaviour before, during and after uttering them. Analyses of general prosodic patterns and styles are to be found in Biela-Wołodziej (2009c), nonverbal aspects in Biela-Wołodziej (2009b), and self-correction patterns of masking and unmasking in Biela-Wołodziej (2009a).

4 How are language masks used - and how are they to be found?

Masking may employ various language tools, from different approaches to linguistic analysis.⁵ Common ones, alongside with sample phrases from the public media, include:⁶

- metaphor (*the jaws of the crisis are opening*),
- metonymy (*the decision of Brussels*),
- euphemism (*cases of mistreatment*),
- passive and impersonal strategies (*it was decided, one prefers*),
- periphrasis/ circumlocution (*the person in charge of the city hall*),
- apophrasis (*not to mention his fraud scandals*),
- understatement, litotes (*insufficient resources, lack of success*),
- hyperbole (*a doomsday for small companies*)⁷,

⁵ First developed in Biela 2001, revised in Biela-Wołodziej 2007, 2009c, 2011a, 2011b, 2012.

⁶ Certain categories overlap with other ones, e.g. euphemism, hyperbole, paraphrase, periphrasis, humour – with each other and with metaphor, metonymy, understatement, etc.

- index phrases (“pointing to” a reality without “touching” it: *these things, all this, such issues*),
- paraphrase (*an undesired situation*)
- implicatures (*the president gave a speech and stayed sober until the end*),
- riddles (to be guessed from the context: of a *you-know-what* type, e.g. *we all know what it leads to*, and *there-is-what-there-is* type: *and then happened what happened*),
- magic cap (eye contact, gesture or vague vocalisation instead of verbum propium, e.g. *he must have...* [gesture indicating the masked concept: bribing, going to the toilet, etc.]).

A separate broad category of masking language tools is humour, including irony. Its most common masking function (whether “friendly” or “nasty”) is a social mask, which entertains and creates a sense of solidarity or common ground, and a distance to reality, often combined with a protective mask of all subtypes, where the message is moderated and made more emotionally accessible, especially when the content is very difficult, taboo or serious (Biela-Wołośńiej 2008). Humour, especially irony, may also doubt in the “face value” of the given expression. A language tool especially prone to that is hyperbole, where the prosodic aspect or nonverbal context may suggest an ironic interpretation of its content, and hence make fun of the hyperbole or turn its “strength” into a euphemism. The speaker may thus hide from responsibility for the words behind the humour so that the receiver is confused and not sure if the speaker really means it.

The mechanism of masking may also be present at the level of text, e.g. the title or headline of an article may suggest the main idea of the text or impose a certain interpretation. Masking need not use concrete rhetorical figures, but may involve a deliberate manipulative a paraphrase to suggest a different interpretation of the content and mislead the addressee (mild examples include *ecological leather, soybean hamburgers* – used as protective masks) or “mistaking” names which sound similar (“deliberate error”, a seeming slip of a tongue). Manipulations of names that appear similar belong to the “deliberate error” masking tools and are often present in international political contexts and translation within these contexts, causing various controversies – examples might include such “slips of a tongue” or “mental shortcuts”, as *Polish Concentration Camp* in place of *Nazi Concentration Camp in Poland*⁸, *Hatyn* (a place of Nazi war crimes on Belorussians) in place of *Katyń* (a place of Soviet war crimes on Poles)⁹, *Warsaw Uprising* in place of *Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (two different historical events, of a different scope, time and context, although both in Warsaw against the German occupation), etc. (examples from Biela-Wołośńiej 2011a). Obviously, as the crucial feature of masking is the intention to “pretend” and present the expressed content in a modified way, not all indirect expressions, errors or modifications are masks – only the intended ones.

The reasons and ways of using the particular types of language masks vary, however, tendencies may be observed, as certain language tools are more typically used in

⁷ Hyperbole, by exaggerating to an absurd extent, may also give a humorous effect, potentially ironic, questioning the content, and potentially work as an understatement (Biela-Wołośńiej 2012, Biela-Wołośńiej and Fornalczyk 2012).

⁸ As a result of such “misunderstandings”, the official English name of the Auschwitz (Oświęcim) concentration camp has been changed to *German Nazi Concentration Camp in Poland*.

⁹ As the Russian Federation still does not welcome information on the Katyń genocide (the massacre of ab. 20.000 Polish officers by the Soviets during World War II, in Katyń and surrounding villages), visitors to Belarus are offered leaflets with the Hatyn (also spelled Chatyń, Khatyn) memorial (of a German Nazi murder on the Belorussians) so that it is confused with Katyń.

the function of certain types of masks than other ones. The most commonly used masks are protective – of both subtypes. The “good intention” protective masks (type 1) belong to a politeness strategy or dealing with a social taboo to protect one’s own face and emotions (like a gas mask) or not harm the other party (like a surgeon’s mask). However, protective masks “in bad intention” (type 2) use language to protect only the wearer/sender, and conceal the fact that his or her intentions might be contrary to those of the other party/addressee, and are used to overcome any resistance and enable to work for their harm, in a covert way, as is done by a thief (thief’s mask) or manipulator, who pretends to have different intentions (like a wolf in a sheep’s skin). The role of both types of protective masks is fulfilled by the greatest variety of language tools (metaphors, metonymies, euphemisms, periphrases, apophasis, litotes, understatements, passive and impersonal constructions, conversational implicatures, riddles, index-phrases, “magic caps”, etc.), and the function of protective masks “in bad intention” (type 2) may additionally be fulfilled by “deliberate errors”.

The second most common type of a language mask is an exaggerating mask (type 6), where the user only highlights the aspects of the concept which are relevant in the given context, using a “mental shortcut” – e.g. using metonymy or exaggerating with a hyperbole – like a theatre mask, which briefly expresses the basic archetypes. The next type, mediating masks (type 4) express what is complicated or emotionally difficult (like a ritual mask), often simultaneously play a protective role, and may be fulfilled by metaphors, index phrases or riddles.

Social masks (type 3), i.e. language tools aimed to entertain, abreact and violate social norms (like with a carnival mask) appear in various types of humour, often also with a double function of a protective mask, as a pleasant atmosphere helps expressing a given message in a less overt way – both in good and in bad will. Depicting masks (type 5) seem not to occur as a typical language mask in the sense of concealing, as from their nature they do not aim at hiding, but their essence is to most faithfully copy the original (like a life or death mask). In the linguistic sense, depicting masks are close synonyms, used to most faithfully express a given concept. These masks may be compared not to a painting, where the author may transform and interpret what he or she sees, but rather to a photograph, which “seizes the image”, trying not to disturb it. (Biela-Wołośńiej 2009c, 2011b)

In the context of translation, language masks may function as translation masks. They are especially visible (and analysable) in the translation of politically or culturally relevant texts. Translation masks are discussed in Biela-Wołośńiej (2011a). The fact of dealing with two or more texts (the original and the translation/s) of potentially “the same” content makes it easier to detect masks. They appear especially in the contexts of censorship (primarily protective masks – to smuggle the forbidden content), political correctness (to gain political acceptance), and the receivers’ cultural sensitivity (e.g. considering their historical experiences or system of values). Non-political motivations for using translation masks concern cultural differences that hinder communication (mediating and exaggerating masks), pedagogical reasons (e.g. to protect children’s feelings or not to model harmful behaviours¹⁰), and when the text in the target language should serve a different purpose (e.g. more or less persuasive) than the original (protective masks, exaggerating masks). Thick dissertations could be written on analysing language masks in the translation of controversial texts, especially those which were

¹⁰ Such was the motive for Thomas Bowdler’s *family Shakespeare*, a version of Shakespeare’s works without drastic scenes and expressions, which could be read in the presence of ladies.

subject to political censorship. In Poland and other Warsaw-Pact countries, translators of western literature exercised extraordinary creativity in the times of communism to cope with political censorship. The language masks served to improve the image of anything connected with the ruling system and the Soviet Union, and impair the image of “the West”, as well as to conceal (often through an allusion – metonymy) or omit the contents regarded as improper. Obviously, the constraints of censorship and political correctness also apply to literature, even children’s (Biela-Wołończiej 2011a).¹¹

A mask, whether in translation or not, often may suggest totally different valuing and connotations, by presenting a different cognitive structure and perspective on the same fact (assuming that there exist such things as “the same facts”), as e.g. in the case of forced migrations after World War II, which the German side may call *expatriation* of their citizens from the territories inhabited by Germans before 1945 (*leaving* their homeland), while the Polish side calls the migrations of its citizens from the eastern territories (which after the war joined to the Soviet Union) *repatriation* (*returning* to their homeland) – although in both cases the destination place was not the one of the people’s birth or “origin”. Another example, also of a historical-political significance, is translating the expression *concentration camps in Poland* (camps on the Polish territory) as *Polish concentration camps* (whose ambiguity may suggest belonging to the Poles/Polish state). (Biela-Wołończiej 2011a). The above examples, although may be labelled with different categories of linguistic and social terms, have one thing in common – the content, their “message”, is profiled and modified to appear “a little different”. It is done for various reasons and with various intentions, but it is intentional (although not necessarily conscious).

Language masks may also be a tool of conscious manipulation within one language. As a result of the “paraphrase” of *prawo własności* [in Polish: ‘property right’ of real estate] of owning property into *prawo własnościowe* [‘proprietal/’‘propertish’ right], “a state similar to owning property”, many Poles lost their property in the post-war time under communist legacy (Biela-Wołończiej 2012), while substituting *stwierdzenie nieważności* [‘stating an (initial) invalidity’] of a Catholic church marriage by *unieważnienie* [‘invalidation’, i.e. making invalid] suggests the possibility of a church divorce.

Although it may be used difficult to definitely guess the author’s intention concerning single expressions, as not all instances of indirectness or using a synonymous phrase involve masking, but only those with the intention to profile the message – still, given a whole text and context it is usually possible to see if there was an intentional masking strategy concerning a given concept.

5 How may language masks be useful for the methodology of linguistic analyses?

The concept of a language mask may be used independently, but it may also be related and combined with various existing approaches to text and discourse analysis, such as facework, mitigation, image management, and other semantic, cognitive, sociolinguistic

¹¹ For the sake of political correctness in *The adventures of Nils* by Selma Lagerlöf, in the Swedish original the character’s parents are going to the church, while in the Russian translation they are going to the market; and Pippi Langstrumpf’s father, an African/Black king in the original, in first English translations is called *cannibal*, and more recently *King of Natives* (as discussed in Biela-Wołończiej 2011a).

and discourse-analytic concepts, also in translation studies and political linguistics, as it seems methodologically compatible with them.

A methodological implication of the present approach to studying text and discourse would be to analyse various aspects of language masks in various text types in all media, written and spoken: [but leave the final colon]: the lexical expressions used as masks, their frequency, position, the types of masks they represent, the types of language tools with a masking function (e.g. rhetorical figures, as in Biela-Wołośńiej 2007, 2009c, 2011a, 2012), their semantic content and cognitive structure, such as the conceptualisations, construal or preconceptual/image schemata, also with a cross-cultural perspective (as in Biela-Wołośńiej 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2012), their cultural grounding and imagery present in them, their psycho- and sociolinguistic functions, the axiological load (valuing) suggested by the masks (as in Biela-Wołośńiej and Fornalczyk 2011, 2012), the emotional connotations evoked by the particular masking expression, masking as a strategy at various levels of the text, the reasons why they might be used, etc. An example of a particular narrow aspect analysed is the speaker's emotional-cognitive decision making process as to whether to use a more direct or indirect expression, manifested in using a double expression as a result of changing one's mind and self-correcting, as if "self-translating", where masking and unmasking of the same content occurs within one utterance (Biela-Wołośńiej 2009a) or the relation of the verbal and nonverbal aspects of communication when using language masks while talking about a difficult subject (2009b). Biela-Wołośńiej and Fornalczyk (2011, 2012) analyse semantically clear children's literary characters' names as instances of masks that convey an axiological load to immediately describe the character and simplify perception. In translation studies, language mask is a tool to analyse the relation between the source and target texts (Biela-Wołośńiej 2011a).

The power of language masks lies in the fact that they express a point of view, an evaluation, which – if direct – might be subject to a conscious reflection and potential negation, but if indirect, one is often not aware of its impact. Whether language masks are helpful and beneficial or disturbing and harmful depends on the use and perspective they are judged from. However, they are present and worth revealing, identifying and being aware of. Masks may also be a useful tool to analyse text, discourse and translation – as tools on their own or within various methodologies.

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