

Sosnowiec Bishop Grzegorz Kaszak's Pastoral Letter to His Diocese Priests, dated September 22nd, 2023. The Cooperation and Politeness Therein

Anna PIETRYGA
Opole University, Poland

Abstract: The paper deals with the text of the letter that one of the Polish Christian religious leaders - the Catholic bishop Grzegorz Kaszak – sent to his diocese priests on Sep 22. 2023 (the Catholic church is one of the strongest churches in Poland and Bishop Kaszak was the youngest one among its bishops). In the paper the linguistic theories by H.P. Grice (introduced in his *Implicatures*) and by G.N. Leech (submitted in his *Principles of Pragmatism*) are shortly presented and used to check the text of the letter as to the cooperation (i.e. say what you know is as informative as needed, what you know is true, relevant, perspicuous) and politeness (e.g. be tactful, be modest) it shows when it is read according to their linguistic indications. Bishop Kaszak wrote the letter to his diocese priests after a homosexual sex party was organised in the flat of one of the priests in Dąbrowa Górnicza, a city in Bishop Kaszak's diocese, in August 2023. It was one of many sex scandals in this diocese Bishop Kaszak was ruling since 2009, including the Seminary Rector spending time in a gay dark room. A murder was also committed in Bishop Kaszak's parish when a mentally ill priest killed a young deacon. In the letter to the diocese priests the topic is not that some people were victims, and, as a matter of fact, this word was never used in the letter. What the author concentrated on was rather how indispensable the priests are and how important their work is.

Keywords: Bishop Kaszak, priests, the letter, cooperation, politeness

The following text concerns the Catholic Church, which is one of the major worldwide Christian Churches. It is ruled globally by the Pope from the Vatican and locally by bishops, which makes it a men-governed institution (men only can be

ordained as Catholic priests, with bishops chosen from among the priests). The Catholic Church is the strongest religious faction in Poland. The bishops traditionally send occasional pastoral letters to their diocesans to instruct them - both priests and lay people (Duchniewski 2004: 1161-1165) - to be read during religious gatherings.

Bishop Grzegorz Kaszak was the youngest bishop in Poland (aged 45 when ordained). He became a bishop in 2009, after many years he had spent working in Italy (since 1997) (PAP: 2009). He was the bishop of Sosnowiec Diocese till his resignation in 2023. Before the resignation, he had written at least three pastoral letters in 2023: one to his diocese priests and two to his diocesans, the three dated resp. 22.09.2023., 23.06.2023 and 24.09.2023 (<https://diecezja.sosnowiec.pl/aktualnosci/listy-bis-diec&page=0> [access: 28.10.2023] and <https://misyjne.pl/bp-grzegorz-kaszak-prosi-wiernych-wspierajcie-zawstydzonych-ksiezy/> [access:30.11.2023]). The first of them is the subject of this article.

Aim and Methodology of This Paper

In this paper, I intend to check what Henry P. Grice's *Implicatures* and G. N. Leech's *Principles of Pragmatism* say about how the sentences in the letter may be read.

For Grice, "[t]he basic idea was to distinguish two notions of meaning: what a sentence means in general apart from any use of it, and what a specific speaker means by using the sentence on a particular occasion. Grice sees the latter notion as entirely a matter of what the speaker intends" (Grandy, Warner 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/grice/> [access: 30.11.2023]). He formulated a basic general rule, which was the following Cooperative Principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 1989, *Studies in the Way of Words* (SWW)),

Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; a collection including most of the important works published during his lifetime, p. 26, [after:] Grandy and Warner, op.cit.). He next proposed four detailed indications on how to be cooperative in that way - the first of these "includes two injunctions, one to make your contribution as informative as is required, and the second to make it no more informative than is required", the second demands that what you say should be true ("Try to make your contribution one that is true); the third asserts that you should "be relevant", and the final demand is "be perspicuous" – the four called the Maxim of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner, respectively (*ibid.*).

Grice's theory was further developed by G. N. Leech in his 1983 book *Principles of Pragmatism*. Leech thought the two theories - Grice's and his own – to complement each other, as the former concerned cooperation and the latter, politeness. Leech studied utterances in their pragmatic interpersonal context checking whether they are rhetorically cooperative, polite or ironical. Politeness requires one to be tactful (the Tact Maxim), which means the speaker should minimise the cost of the listener and to maximise his or her benefit (Leech 1983: 124, 132). It also requires one to be modest (in the Modesty Maxim), requiring the speaker to "(a) minimise praise of self, (b) maximise dispraise of self" (Leech, 1983: 132), and to (a) Minimize antipathy between *self* and *other*, and (b) Maximize sympathy between *self* and *other*, following the Sympathy Maxim (*idem*, pp. 132, 139).

Leech also claims that the hearer's task is different from that of the speaker. While the speaker is planning to achieve his or her goals, the hearer tries to interpret the message and find out what problem the speaker is trying to solve, cf "Pragmatics involves PROBLEM-SOLVING both from *s[peaker]'s* and from *h[earer]'s* point of view. From *s[peaker]'s* point of view, the problem is one of planning: "Given that I want the mental state of the hearer to change or to remain unchanged in such and such ways, how do I

produce an utterance which will make that result most likely?" (Leech 1983:36). The hearer needs to do their own work of interpretation, cf. " 'Given that *s[peaker]* has said *U*, what is the most likely reason for *s[peaker]*'s saying *U*?' The problem-solving procedures are very different in these cases. The latter case, that of interpretation, may in fact be considered a 'meta-problem-solving' procedure, since the problem *h* has to solve is 'What was the communicative problem *s[peaker]* was trying to solve when *s[peaker]* said *U*?' " (*ibid.*).

In order to identify the communicative problems that Bishop Grzegorz Kaszak was trying to solve by writing his letter to his diocesan priests, let us look at its context first.

The Context of the Letter

Bishop's Grzegorz Kaszak's letter to his diocese priests was written after the sex party in Dąbrowa Górnicza (a city in his diocese), which had been organised in August 2023 (Onet 2023) in the flat of one of the priests (Tomasz Z.), to which a sex worker was invited. One of the men needed medical help during the party as he had lost his consciousness but nobody let the paramedics in so the police forced the door.

In the letter Bishop Kaszak informs the priests about his lack of knowledge about the details of the sex party and he informs the clergy one needs to wait for the results sent in by the lawyer and the diocese commissions. However, it was just one of many surprising and shameful events in this diocese to which the bishop had never reacted immediately. In 2010, one of the diocese priests, who was also a Seminary Rector, had engaged in a gay dark room and had revealed his identity to his partner, a Jagiellonian University scientist, on the site (PAP 2023, biskup-sosnowiecki-rezygnuje-w-tle-obyczajowe-skandale (Sosnowiec Bishop resigns, moral scandals in the background). It was as late as 2013 that the Vatican Commission dissolved the Sosnowiec

Seminary. Nine years later, in the Bishop's parish in Sosnowiec a mentally ill priest, who had stopped taking medication, killed a young deacon, Mateusz Bałut (Serafin. 2023), and then committed suicide by throwing himself in front of a train (Konopka 2023). In his last will he wrote that he wanted to have a Catholic funeral on the condition that the bishop would not take part in it (Serafin 2023).

Checking the Text for Cooperation and Politeness

From the point of view of a recipient of the letter, I will try to find "the most likely reason" for Bishop Kaszak writing what he did in the letter. I will check the text paragraph by paragraph using both theories: Grice's and Leech's, starting from the first paragraph. The reader of this paper need not interpret the bishop's letter in the same way.

The first thing that surprises me in the letter is the contradiction between the bishop's initial declaration: "Recent happenings in Dąbrowa Górnicza filled us with great pain, shame and anger caused by what had happened there!" as contrasted to the second sentence of the letter, which says "we do not know everything, [as the - *addition A.P.*] prosecutor's office is investigating the case". As reader, I would say the bishop knows indeed enough about the event to feel shame, yet he started the letter talking about how little he knows. In doing so, he broke Grice's maxim of quantity. Continuing the first paragraph, the bishop declares that some commissions (lay and ecclesiastical ones) are still investigating the case, so it is difficult to say what exactly happened - which breaks the maxim of relevance, as nobody expects the bishop to present the committees' results, due to the fact that the bishop's pastoral letters are meant to instruct.

¹ All fragments from Bishop Kaszak's Letter have been translated by the author of this article.

When I attempt to find the problems that Bishop Kaszak was trying to solve in writing that, it seems obvious that he might have both felt guilty for allowing the described situation in Dąbrowa Górnicza to continue, so he tries to diminish his knowledge, even though he should know what is going on in his diocese and react to any breaches that occur there. That would be breaking the maxim of tact, as, in doing so, he does not "minimise the cost of the listener and [...] maximise his or her benefit". It is also possible that he said so to send a message to his gay priests that he would not tell anyone about what was going on in Dąbrowa Górnicza. That would be maximising sympathy between them, but as it would be complicity in the crime, it would break the sympathy maxim when you consider the point of view of the priests that were not engaged in that crime, as well as of lay diocesans. That interpretation would fit in with what he says at the end of the first paragraph: "Pinning the patch on all Dąbrowa Górnicza priests is wrong. Any generalisation in this regard is unfair." We cannot know the facts about the crime, but I suppose the general statement "Every priest taking part voluntarily in the sex party in Dąbrowa Górnicza parish is guilty" or "Every priest sexually abusing another priest or seminar student is guilty" are general statements and would not be wrong. It would be tactful had he admitted that, instead of breaking the sympathy maxim related to his diocesans.

The second paragraph is more solemn. It begins with the following sentence. "Even after this disgraceful event we must not forget - I do remember - about your, Dear Priests, tough ministry you are doing here on Earth which in some areas is like a mission." Speaking about "some areas" in which the ministry is like a mission, the bishop breaks the maxim of quality, as everywhere the ministry is like a mission, because every Christian's life is a mission in any place. What is the "the most likely reason" for Bishop Kaszak to say that? It is to say

something positive about priests, the group to which he belongs himself. The maxim of relevance has been broken again, as the overstatement about priests is not to the point of the letter, but we may decode it as an attempt to present the author in a better light.

Next, in the second paragraph, the bishop writes about the functions of priests as far as the sacraments are concerned and sums up this fragment by saying "And there is no one that might replace you in this" - thus breaking the quality maxim in various ways. First, even if you agree to what the Catholic Church teaches, that it is men only who should and can be ordained priests and perform the holy Eucharist and the sacrament of penance, undoubtedly one particular priest is replaceable, including the bishop himself (which is already being done, as Bishop Kaszak resigned from office and Archbishop of Katowice Adrian Galbas will be directing the diocese until a new bishop is ordained (Malinowska 2023). Second, it need not be the case that women cannot be ordained priests in the Catholic Church. Nowadays they may serve, according to 1983 code of Canon Law - just like men - as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, when the Catholic Canon Law Code says in its 230 §3 the following "When the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply certain of their duties, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion, according to the precepts of the law". (Up to now in the Polish Catholic church women have not been allowed to be permanent deacons). The reason he said that might have been to quiet his lay diocesans who think they need their parish priests. This would be breaking the modesty maxim which says: minimise praise of self and maximise dispraise of self. The sympathy maxim is broken here as well, because what was said does not minimise the antipathy between speaker and hearer.

Further in the second paragraph the bishop tells the priests how important their work is to the lay people, as at the school lessons of catechism they are conveying values which can make the world better. He admits that "[w]e are only fragile vessels that by the will of our Lord Jesus Christ carry the Treasure to people", yet he asks rhetorically "[i]f there is a shortage of vessels, how can the Treasure reach the people?" And he concludes "[y]ou are invaluable, the world needs you.". What makes him say this? Presumably, it is to make the priests who are guilty feel safe, and those who are not, as well as the other people, not feel angry with any of the priests, including the bishop. In writing this fragment of the second paragraph, he is breaking the maxim of quality, as the seminary was not conveying the said values to the young students who were invited by their teachers to "secret vespers," which consisted of organising sex parties (Pacholczyk 2023, Terlikowski 2023), so I do not believe they were conveying the values to younger children either, especially as they may be the seminary students' siblings. The maxim of quantity is broken, too, as this paragraph is the longest one and not easily understandable, either, so the maxim of manner is also not being obeyed here. The last maxim to be checked is the maxim of relevance, and the test turns out negative as well, except for its relevance for his own rhetorical game. Thus serves the last sentence of the second paragraph, in which the bishop refers to "Lord Jesus, who, after Judas had betrayed him, did not dissolve the community of apostles: on the contrary, he strengthened it even more, sending the Holy Ghost, and sent them to the people." In this sentence, Bishop Kaszak does not mention the fact that Judas killed himself soon after the betrayal (The Gospel according to Matthew Chapter 27, verse 5 and Acts of the Apostles Ch. 1, verse 18), which makes the group of apostles not have the murderer among them any more, so again the sentence breaks the maxims of quantity, quality and relevance to the main topic; however, it is relevant to the point he wants to

make in this particular letter: to hide his own guilt of doing nothing when it was his duty to help the victims, including the suicide of the mentally ill priest who had murdered the young deacon in 2022.

The third paragraph is short - it contains only 307 words, 11 of which are a quote from Saint Paul's letter to the Romans, Chapter 5, verse 20, about sin and grace. The other words urge the priests to open themselves to the Holy Spirit, assure them that Lord Jesus is with them, they are his priests and he will comfort them. Besides, they should remember to pray to "our beloved Mother". In this short text the sin is diminished, to praise the labour group Bishop Kaszak belongs to. Thus, Grice's maxims of quantity and relevance are broken in his saying too much outside the main point of the letter. The fragment, in Leech's terms, breaks the politeness principle in not being tactful, as he does not minimise the cost of the listener, nor does he maximise his or her benefit. He broke the modesty maxim as well, praising himself and all the priests, even though "their beloved Mother" had just been offended by their deeds.

The next paragraph is dedicated to the topic of the criticism of priests and the fact that the Sosnowiec basilica, "The pearl of Dąbrowa Basin", had been set on fire (it had happened one month after the sex party in the flat of the priest. Cf. FiM «2023»). The bishop continues: «We, the priests, after this terrible happening, feel beaten and even though the popular norm says "you don't kick a man lying down" many people will avail themselves of the situation just to kick the man lying down». He continues rhetorically: "Let us consider what the source is of this brutal attack". In writing that, he broke the maxim of quality in suggesting there is no visible reason for that, the maxim of quantity in wasting words of another paragraph. As for Leech's politeness maxims, the bishop is not being tactful, as he does not minimise the cost of the listener, nor does he maximise his or her

benefit. The maxim of modesty is broken, too, because instead of maximising dispraise of himself he talks about other peoples' sins. All this does not maintain the sympathy maxim, because in writing that he maximises antipathy between himself and the hearer. What is the reason he had for doing that? I think it might be to change the subject to someone else's sins.

The next paragraph is about repenting. The bishop informs the priests that "the priest is the one who should repent for his own sins and for the sins of the whole world". He encourages the priests to "fasting and even more fervent penance". He generalises these indications, though in the first paragraph he had said in this regard that all generalisations are unfair, so he is breaking the maxim of manner in contradicting himself. In limiting the obligation to the priests he is breaking the quality maxim, as many other persons do repent not only for their own sins, but also for those of other people.

The next paragraph has only 28 words. It is a thank you paragraph for those people who are kind to the priests in that "difficult time" and "May God reward you for your kindness". This paragraph seems all right as far as Grice's maxims are concerned. But if we ask ourselves what made him write this, I think he wanted to make the people reduce the tension by making them realize he would be thankful for that and, what is more, he can bless them if he wants to.

This leads us to the next paragraph, in which Bishop Kaszak states that there is no approval for "moral evil" and anybody found guilty will be punished, independently of the judgment of a civil court. In Gricean terms, this suggests his lack of knowledge, and so it seems to me to break the quality maxim. In Leech's terms, tact and sympathy maxims are broken again. Bishop Kaszak also wrote: "I apologize to everybody who were affected and saddened or even raptured with the situation that took place in Dąbrowa Górnicza". This does not mean he apologizes to the sex worker

left alone after he had lost his consciousness, or to the parishioners who were taught homosexual sex was a sin, or to other priests who had not been breaking the 10 commandments which include "You shall not kill". This is the first time apology words are used in the letter, which contains 645 words. The Polish word for "I am sorry" is "*przepraszam*" and it is the word no 507. In the next paragraph, the bishop says that if he "did something wrong, made a mistake, or failed to do something", then he is "very sorry". The maxim of relevance is broken here, since the place where the subject of guilt should be developed is somewhere else: it is where you may seek and find the victims and say sorry to them. Talking about the victims of the Dąbrowa Górnicza event in 2023 we have to mention the sex worker, who would not have received medical help if it were not for the police, and the lay people who are instructed not to do that sort of thing that was done by their teachers. The bishop behaved like the Pharisees from the Matthew gospel, who "tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 23, line 4).

Instead of saying "I am sorry" to them, he changes the subject - a method known as "the red herring" - to avoid talking openly about his own and other priests' guilt. Instead of that, he says these words to those people, who were "affected and very saddened, or even scorned" by the situation in Dąbrowa Górnicza. The word "victim" does not appear in the text in any of the paragraphs.

The next paragraph is the last but one and it contains apology number two. This "*przepraszam*" is addressed to the readers, that is, mainly to the priests of his diocese, and it is weakened, as it is a part of the following conditional sentence: "If I did something wrong, made a mistake, or neglected something, I am very sorry". Since it is difficult to find things he had not neglected being a

bishop, this conditional breaks the quality maxim. Leech's maxim of sympathy is broken as well, for he does not minimise the cost of the listener except for the listeners who are the wrongdoers, and it is for them he might have written this. Next, the bishop Kaszak declares he is ready to accept all the consequences that this entails and asks the hearers to pray for him.

In the last paragraph, the sorry-word is in the plural: "*przepraszamy*". This time the addressed person is Lord Jesus, and the wrongdoer is "a priest", who has hurt the Church. Both sides are anonymous - the text says only that some priest hurt some other Catholic. He wrote this to have no parish inhabitant to say "I am sorry" to and to be polite to the guilty one(s) among the priests. In doing so, he broke the sympathy maxim and the quality one. Fortunately, a priest from elsewhere, Rev. Marcin Stopka, has written his "*przepraszam*" to the victims (Stopka, M. 2023).

Conclusions

The letter was written on September 22nd, 2023, the next day after the fire had been set under the side door of Dąbrowa Górnicza basilica. It was also one month after a homosexual party had been organised in the flat of one of the Dąbrowa priests. The diocese had experienced similar scandals before and the bishop had never reacted properly. The letter consists of 645 words and it does not concentrate on how to apologise to the victims. In the text, both Grice's maxims of cooperation and Leech's maxims of modesty, tact and sympathy are broken many times, as there is hardly one paragraph out of nine that would not contain a case of maxim violation. Generally, the bishop behaves as an offender who interacts with other offenders in his diocese.

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