

Defining Linguistic Pragmatics in European Scientific Investigations

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Abstract: The purpose of the article is to clarify the origin of the term “pragmatics”, the most indisputable definitions of linguistic pragmatics and the scope of pragmatics study in European scientific investigations. Pragmatics includes a number of issues connected with a speaker, addressee, their interaction in communication, the situation of communication. It covers a wide range of questions that are the subject-matter of the following branches of Linguistics: Semantics, Stylistics, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics and Discourse analysis.

Keywords: linguistic pragmatics; speaker; addressee of the speech; situation of communication

1. Problem Statement

Words in language are related to certain referents which they designate and to other words of the same language with which they make up syntactic units. These relationships are called semantic and syntactic, respectively. Words are also related to the people who use them. To the users of the language its words are not just indifferent, unemotional labels of objects or ideas. The people develop a certain attitude to the words they use. Some of the words acquire definite implications, they evoke a positive or negative response, they are associated with certain theories, beliefs, likes or dislikes. There are “noble” words like “honour, dignity, freedom”, etc. and “low” words like “infamy, cowardice, betrayal”. Words can be nice or ugly, attractive or repulsive. Such relationships between the word and its users are called “pragmatic”.

2. Critical Overview

The modern usage of the term “pragmatics” (from Greek *pragma* - act, action) is attributable to the philosopher Charles Morris who was concerned to outline the general shape of a science of signs, or semiotics. Within semiotics Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry: syntactics (or syntax), being the

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study of “the formal relations of signs to one another”, semantics, the study of “the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable (their designata)”, and pragmatics, the study of “the relation of signs to interpreters”. Within each branch of semiotics one could make the distinction between pure studies, concerned with the elaboration of the relevant metalanguage, and descriptive studies which applied the metalanguage to the description of specific signs and their usages.

As instances of usage are governed by pragmatical rule, Morris noted that interjections such as “*Oh!*” commands such as “*Come here*”, ... expressions such as “*Good Morning!*” and various rhetorical and poetical devices, occur only under certain definite conditions in the users of the language. Such matters would still today be given a treatment within linguistic pragmatics. But Morris went on to expand the scope of pragmatics in accord with his particular behaviouristic theory of semiotics. “It is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs”. Such a scope is very much wider than the work that currently goes on under the rubric of linguistic pragmatics, for it would include what is now known as Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Neurolinguistics and much besides.

Since Morris’s introduction of the trichotomy Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics, the latter term has come to be used in two very distinct ways. Morris has been retained, and this explains the use of the term “pragmatics” in the titles of books that deal, for example, with matters as diverse as the psychopathology of communication and the evolution of symbol systems. Even here though, there has been a tendency to use the term “pragmatics” exclusively as a division of linguistic semiotics, rather than as pertaining to sign systems in general.

On the other hand, the term “pragmatics” was subject to a successive narrowing of scope. After an initial Morrisian usage the philosopher and logician Carnap adopted the following version of the trichotomy: “If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put in more general terms, to the user of language, then we assign it [the investigation] to the field of pragmatics. ... If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. And finally if we abstract from the designata also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax (Полюжин, 2005, p. 237). In fact, in the late 1960s, an implicit version of Carnap’s definition – investigations requiring reference to the users of a language – was adopted within Linguistics and specifically within the movement known as generative semantics. Its association with pragmatics can be explained by the resurgence of the interest in meaning which the movement represented. At the same time, there was a keen interest shown by Linguistics in philosophers’

attempts to grapple with problems of meaning, sometimes from the point of view of the “users of the language” (Morris, 1971, p. 174).

During this period, the scope of pragmatics was implicitly restricted. Carnap’s “investigations making reference to users of the language” is at once too narrow and too broad for linguistic interests. It is too broad because it admits studies as non-linguistic as Freud’s investigations of “slips of the tongue” or Juhg’s studies of word associations. So studies in linguistic pragmatics need to be restricted to investigations that have at least potential linguistic implications. On the other hand, Carnap’s definition is too narrow in that, on a simple interpretation, it excludes parallel phenomena. E.g. just as the interpretation of the words *I* and *You* relies on the identification of particular participants (or “users”) and their role in the speech event so the words *here* and *now* rely for their interpretation on the place and time of the speech event. Therefore Carnap’s definition might be amended to something like: “those linguistic investigations that make necessary reference to aspects of the context”, where the term context is understood to cover the identities of participants, the temporal and spatial parameters of the speech event, and the beliefs, knowledge and intentions of the participants in that speech event, and no doubt much besides.

3. Purpose of Investigation

The purpose of the article is to clarify the origin of the term “pragmatics”, the most indisputable definitions of linguistic pragmatics and the scope of pragmatics study in European scientific investigations.

4. Research Course

4.1. Defining Linguistic Pragmatics

The most indisputable definitions of linguistic pragmatics are:

- 1) the study of those aspects of language that cannot be considered in isolation from the use; in other words, Pragmatics is that branch of Linguistics that deals with language in its situational context, including the knowledge and beliefs of the speaker and the relationship and interaction between speaker and listener;
- 2) from the semiotic point of view Pragmatics is the study of the relation between symbols and those who use them; in other words that is a branch of Semiotics dealing with causal and other relations between words, expressions or symbols and their users.

Pragmatics can be defined in a wide sense as the influence of knowledge and beliefs about the structure of the real world in contrast to knowledge about the

language system. It studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others. In theory, we can say anything we like. In practice, we follow a large number of social rules (most of them unconsciously) that constrain the way we speak. There is no law that says we must not tell jokes during a funeral, but it is generally “not done”. Less obviously, there are norms of formality and politeness that we have intuitively assimilated, and that we follow when talking to people who are older, of the opposite sex, and so on.

Pragmatic factors always influence our selection of sounds, grammatical constructions and vocabulary from the resources of the language. Some of the constraints are taught to us at a very early age – in British English, e.g. the importance of saying “please” and “thank you”. A well-studied example is the pronoun system, which frequently presents distinctions that convey pragmatic force – such as the choice between *tu* and *vous* in French.

Languages differ greatly in these respects. Politeness expressions, for instance, may vary in frequency and meaning. Many European languages do not use their word for *please* as frequently as English does; and the function and force of “*thank you*” may also alter (e.g. following the question “Would you like some more cake?”, English “thank you” means “yes”, whereas French *merci* would mean “no”. Conventions of greeting, leave taking and dining also differ greatly from language to language.

Assuming that we have a clear idea of the limits of semantics, then pragmatics studies all the non-semantic features that are encoded in languages and these features are aspects of the context that reflect conditions and goals of utterance realization.

What peculiarities of the gross physical, social and interactional aspects of the situation of utterance are linguistically relevant is thus an empirical question, and we can study the world's languages to find out what they are. There is an important distinction here between Universal Pragmatics, the general theory of what aspects of context get encoded and how and the Language-Specific Pragmatics of individual languages; e.g. the pragmatics of English might have relatively very little to say about social status (beyond what we need to describe the appropriate contexts for the use of Sir, your honour and the like, while in contrast the Pragmatics of Japanese would be greatly concerned with the grammaticalization of the relative social ranks of participants and referents.

On the other hand, the notion of grammaticalization, or linguistic encoding, is thorny for a feature of the context to be linguistically encoded; the notion of encoding implies that Pragmatics is concerned with certain aspects of meaning. One kind of definition that would make it central might run as follows: *Pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory.*

Assuming that Semantics is limited to the statement of truth conditions Gazdar writes “Pragmatics has as its topic those aspects of the meaning of utterances which cannot be accounted for by straightforward reference to the truth conditions of the sentences uttered” (Полюжин, 2005, p. 239). Put crudely: Pragmatics = Meaning – Truth Conditions.

Another difficulty facing the definition of pragmatics is that it calls for some explicit characterization of the notion of context. As a rule, it is defined as the parts of a written or spoken statement that precede or follow a specified word or passage and can influence its meaning or effect. Here one needs to distinguish between actual situations of utterance in all their multiplicity of features and the selection of just those features that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation of utterances. The latter refer to the notion of context. Lyons lists the following features of context: 1) knowledge of role and status (where role covers both role in the speech event, as speaker or addressee and social role, and status covers notions of relative social standing; 2) knowledge of spatial and temporal location; 3) knowledge of formality level; 4) knowledge of the medium (roughly the code or style appropriate to a channel, like the distinction between written and spoken varieties of a language); 5) knowledge of appropriate subject matter; 6) knowledge of appropriate province (or domain) determining the register of a language.

Ochs notes that in defining the scope of context, one must consider the social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time”, “it includes minimally language users, beliefs and assumptions about temporal, spatial and social settings; prior, ongoing and future actions (verbal, non-verbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction in hand (Ochs, 1993, p. 336). Both Lyons and Ochs stress that context must not be understood to exclude linguistic features, since such features often invoke the relevant contextual assumptions.

As Pragmatics is the study of the role context plays in speaker- (or utterance-) meaning it covers both context-dependent aspects of language structure and principles of language usage and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure. Therefore the most promising are the definitions that equate pragmatics with “meaning minus semantics”, or with a theory of language understanding that takes context into account in order to complement the contribution that semantics makes to meaning.

Thus, if *syntactics* (or syntax) in language explains how an utterance is organized, how a person speaks (from the point of view of outer language forms), if *semantics* demonstrates what he says, what a certain utterance means, then *pragmatics* tries to throw light on the conditions and goals of a given conversation. In other words, pragmatics studying the relation of signs to people using them, shows why this phrase has been uttered and what is to follow in the future. *Pragmatics as a whole*

is defined as a linguistic aspect studying the relations between an utterance, speakers and context (situation) within the framework of human activities. Side by side with a semantic value, an utterance has also pragmatic value (or a pragmatic function). A later emergence of Pragmatics as an autonomous linguistic trend is due to the fact that utterances were traditionally studied mainly in their descriptive aspect, beyond the immediate connection with human activities.

4.2. The Scope of Pragmatics Study

In recent years Pragmatics dealing with the study of language in use has become one of the most active and most prolific fields of Linguistics. But it is still a large, loose and disorganized collection of research efforts. It ranges from discourse analysis to speech act theory and from the study of presuppositions to relevance theory. Some approaches in Pragmatics focus on communication in general and on human cognitive processes that make communication possible, while others concentrate on specific languages and on communicative meaning of specific elements (e.g. speech acts or discourse makers) in specific languages. There are pragmatic analyses that compare the linguistic inventory and how it is used by communicators in different languages.

As Pragmatics is not a coherent field of study it includes a number of issues connected with a speaker, addressee, their interaction in communication, the situation of communication.

As far as the speech subject (speaker) is concerned the following issues are studied:

- 1) overt and covert goals of utterances (illocutionary forces), e.g. reporting some information or opinion, a question, order, greeting, complaint, etc.;
- 2) speech tactics and types of speech behaviour;
- 3) the rules of conversation subordinated to the so called principle of cooperation recommending to organize a speech communication according to an object set and the direction of the conversation, e.g. to adequately normalize the reported information (a quantity maxim), to report only a true information and a substantiated appraisal (a quality maxim), to make information relevant to the theme of a conversation (a relation maxim), to make a speech clear, unambiguous and logical (a manner of speech maxim).

These rules formulated by Grice are entitled as conversational maxims or maxims of holding a conversation.

- 4) the aim of the speaker or a pragmatic meaning of an utterance: indirect senses of an utterance, hints, allegory, beating about the bush, etc.;
- 5) speaker's reference, that is the reference of language expressions to the objects of reality, arising from a speaker's intention;

6) pragmatic presuppositions: a speaker's evaluation of the overall knowledge stock, a concrete being kept informed, interests, opinions, and views, psychological state, the peculiarities of character and the power of understanding an addressee;

7) speaker's attitude to what is being informed: a) the evaluation of an utterance content (its truth or falsity, irony, significance, lack of seriousness, etc.); b) focusing the interest on one of the persons spoken about or empathy (the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings); c) organizing an utterance according to what is mostly paid attention to.

As far as the addressee of the speech is concerned the following issues are studied:

1) a speech interpretation, including the rules of inferring indirect and covert senses from a direct utterance meaning; in these rules context, pragmatic situation and presupposition are taken into account as well as the aim with which a speaker may consciously deviate from the generally accepted maxims of communication (e.g. to violate the principle of relevance, to inform about things that are obvious to the addressee, etc.);

2) an utterance influence on the addressee (perlocutive effect): the extension of the addressee's being kept informed; changes in emotional condition, views and evaluations of the addressee; the influence on the actions performed by him; aesthetic effect, etc.;

3) types of speech reactions on the received stimulus (direct and indirect reactions, e.g. ways of deviations from a direct answer to a question). As far as the relations between the participants of the communication are concerned the following issues are studied: a) forms of speech communication (informative dialogue, a friendly speech, argument, quarrel, etc.); b) social etiquette variety of speech (forms of address, style of address; c) correlation between the participants of communication in certain speech acts (compare a request and order).

As far as the situation of communication is concerned the following issues are studied:

1) the interpretation of deictic signs (e.g. "here", "now", "this") as well as indexical components in word meanings (compare the indication on space orientation in verbs of the type: "to come", "to approach", etc.);

2) the influence of speech situation on the subjects and forms of communication (compare typical themes and forms of conversations while being guests, at banquets, at hospitals, casualty wards, lawyer's reception room etc.).

Pragmatics also studies speech within the framework of the general theory of human activities. Having put forward language use as an amalgamating principle in communicative situations and pragmatic competence of the speakers, nowadays

Pragmatics covers a wide range of questions that were for a long the subject-matter of the following branches of Linguistics:

1. Semantics. Pragmatics and Semantics both take into account such notions as the intentions of the speaker, the effect of an utterance on listeners, the implications that follow from expressing something in a certain way, and the knowledge, beliefs and presuppositions about the world upon which speakers and listeners rely when they interact.
2. Stylistics and Sociolinguistics. These fields overlap with Pragmatics in their study of the social relationships which exist between participants and of the way extralinguistic setting, activity, and subject-matter can constrain the choice of linguistic features and varieties.
3. Psycholinguistics. Pragmatics and psycholinguistics both investigate the psychological states and abilities of the participants that will have a major effect upon their performance – such factors as attention, memory and personality.
4. Discourse analysis. Both Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics are centrally concerned with the analysis of conversation and share several of the philosophical and linguistic notions that have been developed to handle this topic (such as the way information is distributed within a sentence, deictic forms, or the notion of conversational maxims). As a result of these overlapping areas of interest, several conflicting definitions of the scope of Pragmatics have arisen. One approach focuses on the factors formally encoded in the structure of a language (honorific forms *tu/vous* choice in French, for instance, etc.) another relates it to a particular view of Semantics: here, Pragmatics is seen as the study of all aspects of meaning other than those involved in the analysis of sentences in terms of truth conditions.

Other approaches adopt a much broader perspective. The broadest seen Pragmatics as the study of the principles and practice underlying all interactive linguistic performance – this including all aspects of language usage, understanding and appropriateness.

5. Concluding Remarks

The article has clarified the origin of the term “pragmatics”, the most indisputable definitions of linguistic pragmatics and the scope of pragmatics study in European scientific investigations. Pragmatics includes a number of issues connected with a speaker, addressee, their interaction in communication, the situation of communication. It covers a wide range of questions that are the subject-matter of the following branches of Linguistics: Semantics, Stylistics, Sociolinguistics, Psycholinguistics and Discourse analysis.

6. Further Research

The prospect of research is to use the results for pragmatics study for fundamental investigation of value paradigms of the Ukrainian, English and French language societies.

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