

PRAGMATICS: COGNITION, CONTEXT AND CULTURE

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The book here reviewed is a well-expressed, up-to-date and comprehensive description of the concerns of pragmatics. It consists of six chapters, with chapters 2 to 5 each covering a major area of this all-embracing field of linguistics. The first chapter is an introduction that explains the difference between semantics and pragmatics by reference to Leech's (1983: 6) pithy contrast in the questions *What does X mean?* (semantics) vs. *What did you mean by X?* (pragmatics) (2), the underdeterminacy of language (9-12) and the overriding exploitation of indirectness in expressing meaning (18-23). Great importance is also attached to the cultural facet of the determination of meaning (23-27). Chapter 2 deals with speech acts, while chapter three deals with reference, inference and implicature, including Grice's conversational implicature. Chapter 4 looks at the more recent topic of politeness and its corollary, impoliteness. Chapter 5 provides an overview of Relevance Theory and explains the trade-off between explicature, that is, fully explicit communication, and processing effort, while chapter 6 rounds the book off with completely up-to-date information on all the recent spin-offs of the theories expounded in the earlier chapters.

The publication is a successful mixture of simplicity and complexity that goes well beyond most manuals and textbooks written on the topic. It provides clear explanations of many of the issues that are usually found to be challenging by the average student of semantics and pragmatics, such as the subject of logical

positivism and the concept of truth conditions (37), or the difference between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts (46). The authors make the useful clarification that “[...] a perlocutionary act is not performed *in* saying something, but *by* saying it”. Additionally, a way of testing whether an act is illocutionary or perlocutionary is suggested.

The above technical terms are always referred to in books on pragmatics, but they are rarely given the lucid, straightforward and detailed explanation provided in the present text. Other topics receive more than their usual share of attention, as is the case of deixis (80-90), which is given full coverage, including mention of the overlapping of person and place deixis (*Same here!* ‘So am I’) and the interesting complementary information that English *he* can ultimately be traced back to Proto-Indo-European **ki-* (‘here’), and *she* to **so-* (‘this, that’) (86-87). Locative deictics are also shown to be used in discourse reference (*Here I agree with you ...*, *There I disagree ...*, etc.) (88).

More is made of Searle’s contribution to Speech Act Theory (chapter 2) than in most textbooks. In fact, a whole section (2.6, 51-58) is devoted to his development of Austin’s ideas, and the authors are at pains to emphasize that Searle undertook a substantial critical revision of Austin’s work, rather than a mere recasting. Searle was careful to point out that it is not uncommon for the categories of speech act to overlap (commissive and directive, for example) and it is to him that we owe some of the most frequently used terminology, such as IFID (Illocutionary Force Indicating Device).

Unlike traditional books on semantics and pragmatics, the present work treats reference as an indisputably pragmatic mechanism (74-76), crucially dependent on the speaker’s and hearer’s shared knowledge. It is classified into seven different types (76-80) and each type is summarized in tabular form on p. 79. Surprisingly, no mention is made of the traditional sense-reference dichotomy expounded by Gottlob Frege (*Sinn* vs. *Bedeutung* in German), even if only to reject it in favour of a more up-to-date approach, but perhaps this is considered too deeply rooted in semantics to merit attention in the present book on pragmatics.

Several good examples of the use of English *come* and *go* in spatial deixis are given (89), and it is pointed out that such verbs may become grammaticalized as indicators of tense. For example, *to go* is one way to express the future in English (*I’m going to...* = future time without necessarily referring to motion). However, the authors show surprise that Catalan uses the present paradigm of *anar* ‘to go’ to form the preterite, when there exist in English many expressions like *So he goes and drives into a fence*, a dramatic or graphic use of the present tense to allude to past events. A parallel construction in Catalan probably gave rise to the

grammaticalization of *anar* for past reference, as opposed to the retention of the synthetic preterite in Valencian and literary Catalan (cf. literary Catalan *esdevingué* vs. spoken Catalan *va esdevenir* ‘it became’). A similar case of grammaticalization is to be found in the use of *do* as an auxiliary in certain varieties of English (*He done gone* ‘He went’).

Implicature is handled exhaustively by the authors and they take the process beyond Grice to neo-Gricean theories, including scalar implicature and Horn’s reductionist reinterpretation of Grice’s maxims (109-114).

Like all of the previous chapters, the one devoted to the more recent theories of politeness and impoliteness masterfully elucidates the ideas behind these conversational strategies. We are reminded too that, “when we speak of politeness in linguistics, we are not speaking of just social ‘good manners’” (131), an important point often missing from books dealing with the subject. As the authors concisely state, the main intention of politeness is to “minimize the imposition of the request” (131).

The work of Leech on politeness and the face-saving view of Brown and Levinson are well covered, and the latter is contrasted with Watts’s standpoint (134), which views politeness as “a tool for maintaining hegemony in the hands of the powerful” (Leech 2014: 43). The criticisms that have been levelled at the claim for universality are outlined (154-157) and several authors who have underlined the primacy of positive politeness in the Spanish-speaking world are named, though there is no reference to the work of Leo Hickey on Spanish pragmatics in this section (I am thinking in particular of Hickey 1991), who points out that the Anglo-Saxon world may be embarrassed by and suspicious of direct flattery.

The all-pervasive concept of relevance receives full attention in chapter 5. The fundamental belief of its creators is that Grice’s four conversational maxims can be condensed into one, namely relevance, which permeates all our exchanges: “[...] every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of relevance” (Sperber and Wilson 1986: 162). The chapter shows how the hearer is coaxed towards the intended interpretation of a message, but wisely points out that the supposition that “[...] it is always the most relevant interpretation that hearers reach first is ripe for testing” (206). For some unknown reason, the authors only quote from the first edition of Sperber and Wilson (1986), rather than the second (1995), which would have allowed them to check for refinements and modifications in approach, and there is no reference to the update, Wilson and Sperber (2012), which situates Relevance Theory within recent developments in cognitive science.

The last chapter sketches some recent concerns of pragmatics, not least the role of historical pragmatics in motivating semantic change. While abduction is given fair mention (246) under the section dealing with computational linguistics, much more could have been made here of the part played by inference (which is a kind of abduction) in general in motivating extension of meaning or, in the words of Bybee (2015: 133), “Semantic change by adding meaning from the context”. The extension of the meaning of *going to* from temporality to goal or intention can be interpreted in the light of this insight (Bybee 2015: 134), as can the development of *since* from temporal to causal (Bybee 2015: 204), though, admittedly, Alba-Juez and Mackenzie (244) do pay some attention to the connection between Gricean pragmatics and frequently observed types of semantic change (as noted in Traugott 2007: 540).

Every chapter of this book ends with a succinct conclusion, which is followed by a complete, point-by-point summary, arranged in numbered paragraphs, so that no fact is overlooked. Finally, after the summary, there are numerous useful, well thought-out exercises that enable the reader to check what s/he has learned. The degree of difficulty has been well controlled to make them accessible to the average reader, and the first one always consists of fifteen multiple-choice questions (three options), which help the reader to recall every major point made in the chapter.

146

All in all, this is a complete survey of the subject of pragmatics, which all students and scholars of the discipline should read. However, while I feel that it is an excellent text for postgraduates, it is at the same time rather forbidding for undergraduates owing to the array of theories covered and the abundance of terminology used. For undergraduates I would recommend concentration on the first three chapters only. Regarding the plethora of terminology, one wonders whether we need a label for every single linguistic phenomenon. Couldn't some of these be grouped under the same heading? The table on p. 79, for example, lists no fewer than seven different types of reference (see above); deixis is given a similar detailed treatment (80-90).

The whole text is perfectly composed except for the odd slip in the English (*aspect* for *respect* on p. 14, *along* for *throughout* on p. 19, *many times* for *very often* on p. 85) and the fact that the answer to question 2 on p. 30 seems to be unclear. However, only six chapters for 258 pages of text makes reading a chore for the uninitiated. Perhaps further subdivisions into chapters could have been made or, alternatively, it might be a good idea to reissue the book in a separate abridged format for beginners. Disregarding these final comments, the work is probably the best book of its kind on the market to date.

Works Cited

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