

New trends in pragmatics

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New Trends in Pragmatics: An Overview

1. The context

Pragmatics is still a comparatively young discipline in linguistics. Yet, in a relatively short time, it has developed into one of the largest, most diversified and most rapidly growing areas in the study of language and communication (cf., e.g., the nine-volume handbook series *Handbooks of Pragmatics*). Therefore, it is next to impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the entire field of pragmatics. Even an overview of current trends can only be selective, especially under the given limitations. Trends which could unfortunately not be covered here include, for instance, research on verbal impoliteness, rudeness and aggression. This burgeoning new area, which provides a supplement to earlier theories of verbal politeness, such as Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) and Leech's (1983) theories, is now developing into a wider field of inquiry into facework and relational work (cf., e.g., Bousfield 2008, Locher 2008, Watts 2010, Culpeper 2011). Neither could a number of recently developing areas of application be covered. These include, for example, approaches to teaching and learning the pragmatics of a foreign language (cf., e.g., Ishihara and Cohen 2010, also Tatsuki and Houck 2010 and Soler and Martínez-Flor 2008), as well as the currently emerging field of clinical pragmatics, which deals with the diagnostics and therapy of pragmatic disorders in children and adult speakers (cf. especially Cummings 2009).

The discipline of pragmatics can be defined in broad or narrow terms (cf. Huang 2010). In the Anglo-American tradition, it is defined rather narrowly. Characteristically, approaches in this tradition are philosophically oriented and focused on the semantics-pragmatics interface. As a rule, fabricated examples are used for illustration. This perspective, which is associated with Gricean, neo-Gricean and post-Gricean approaches, is, however, not represented here. The present papers, by contrast, exemplify the European tradition, in which a broader perspective is adopted. In this case, pragmatics intersects predominantly with sociolinguistics and, more generally, social science, with a focus on interpersonal and social meaning rather than sentential and textual meaning. Also, researchers working in this tradition analyse language as it occurs in real-world contexts. This applies to the authors of the papers in this section. With the exception of the plenary talk, all papers are based on empirical work, that is, on the analysis of spoken or written data from a range of different sources.

2. The papers

The present section on new trends in pragmatics includes eight contributions written by ten scholars from four countries, viz. the United States of America, Switzerland, Austria, and Germany. Of these eight papers, each represents a different trend in present-day pragmatics. In the plenary talk, a general view of verbal communication is

presented. Three of the other papers refer specifically to the level of speech acts, while the four remaining papers examine a variety of discourse phenomena.

2.1 A cognitive perspective

In his plenary lecture, Istvan Kecskes (State University of New York, Albany) adopts an essentially cognitive perspective as he summarizes his socio-cognitive approach to communication, focusing in particular on individual factors, such as egocentrism, which have so far been neglected by comparison to societal factors. This particular approach is an example of an expanding body of work at the interface of pragmatics and cognitive science (including some psycho- and neurolinguistic approaches). The area is sometimes referred to as **Cognitive Pragmatics** (cf. Schmid forthcoming for an overview).

The particular socio-cognitive approach developed by Kecskes is more closely related to the Anglo-American tradition mentioned above than any other approach presented in the other papers of this section. It is proposed as an alternative to existing pragmatic theories in this tradition which concentrate either on a hearer's interpretation of an utterance or on a speaker's intention. This particular approach, by contrast, combines these two perspectives. Furthermore, it is assumed that speaker production as well as hearer comprehension are governed by salience. Distinguishing different types of salience is central to this socio-cognitive approach, the ultimate aim of which is to make the study of human communication less biased and less idealistic or, in other words, more realistic.

2.2 Variation in speech act behaviour

The three papers focused on the speech act level examine different aspects of language variation. These are the papers by Jucker (Zurich), Barron (Lüneburg), and Anchimbe (Bayreuth). The speech acts investigated are greetings and farewells (Jucker), and offers (Barron, Anchimbe). Anchimbe also discusses offer refusals. Variation is studied in time, i.e. diachronically, across the centuries (Jucker) as well as in geographical and social space, i.e. across countries and cultures (Barron, Anchimbe).

Andreas H. Jucker's paper represents the area of **Historical Pragmatics**, an area originally conceived of and initiated by this very author (cf. Jucker 1995). Most work in Historical Pragmatics to date is synchronic, i.e. focused on one particular work (e.g. *The Canterbury Tales*), one particular author (e.g. Shakespeare), one particular century (e.g. the seventeenth century) or one particular period (e.g. Old English) (cf. Jucker and Taavitsainen 2010). By contrast, Jucker's study is diachronic, spanning the history of the English language from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. In addition, and very significantly, Jucker does not examine one particular speech act, as is commonly the case (cf., e.g., Jucker and Taavitsainen 2008), but instead analyses and contrasts the development of two speech acts, notably greetings and farewells, i.e. those two speech acts which, respectively, open and close conversations and other speech events, thus framing these communicative encounters. For these two speech acts, Jucker uses the term 'salutations' as a cover term. In fact, he does not consider salutations in

isolation, but also considers longer greeting and farewell sequences. The main point of this paper is programmatic, with a clear focus on methodological issues relevant to the diachronic study of salutation sequences or, indeed, any other speech act (sequence) and its realisation in the course of history.

The paper by Anne Barron illustrates work in the area of **Variational Pragmatics**. In fact, this author is one of the two authors who have established this new field of inquiry (cf., e.g., Barron and Schneider 2009). Variational Pragmatics is the interface of pragmatics with variational linguistics, i.e. with dialectology and sociolinguistics. It is aimed at studying the effects of regional and social factors, such as nation, age or gender, on language use in interaction. Thus, Variational Pragmatics is related to Historical Pragmatics, since both disciplines investigate intra-lingual pragmatic variation (cf. Schneider and Barron 2008, 1). Yet, while Historical Pragmatics investigates pragmatic phenomena in and through the history of a language, Variational Pragmatics, by contrast, investigates present-day language. Barron's paper examines and compares the realisation of the speech act of offering in the varieties of English spoken in Ireland and England today. Her focus is on the conventions of form, i.e. the pragmlinguistic choices made to perform offers in Irish English and English English, and specifically the selection of *will* and *shall* in one particular realisation strategy which she finds to display variety-specific patterns. Barron also addresses methodological issues relevant to the employment of parallel corpora in Variational Pragmatics. The material used in her analysis is taken from the British and Irish components of the International Corpus of English (ICE). While the present study concentrates on the speech act level, other levels of pragmatic analysis are also researched in Variational Pragmatics (cf., e.g., Schneider 2010).

Eric A. Anchimbe's paper exemplifies **Postcolonial Pragmatics**, the most recent trend discussed in this section. Anchimbe is one of the very few researchers in this nascent field, which was first outlined programmatically by Richard W. Janney in 2009 (cf. Janney 2009). In general, it can be said that while Variational Pragmatics concentrates on pragmatic variation across and within national, regional and social varieties of a language, Postcolonial Pragmatics examines pragmatic features in the use of ex-colonial languages in postcolonial societies with their specific mix of ethnic communities, languages, cultures and social conventions. In other words, the aim of Postcolonial Pragmatics is the study of language use in interaction in communities who speak languages, such as English, neither as a native nor as a foreign language, but as a second language. This language is often an official language and an inter-ethnic *lingua franca* (cf. Anchimbe and Janney 2011). This is the case, for example in Ghana and Cameroon, where Anchimbe collected his data for the present study by employing written questionnaires. Like Barron, Anchimbe analyses offers, and he also considers responses to offers. In particular, his analysis is focused on kinship terms and expressions of endearment which are used to mitigate offer refusals. Anchimbe does not observe any significant differences between Ghanaian and Cameroonian offering behaviour, which may, however, be due to the small size of his samples. It will be interesting to see whether there are any shared features between the second-

language use of English in further postcolonial societies (cf. also Mühleisen forthcoming).

2.3 Approaches to discourse

Of the remaining four papers, each represents a different approach to discourse. These are the papers by Bublitz and Hoffmann (Augsburg), Kettemann and Marko (Graz), Fetzer (Würzburg) and Egg (Humboldt University, Berlin). In these papers, different types of discourse are considered, namely spoken discourse (Fetzer), written discourse (Kettemann and Marko, and Egg) and electronic discourse (Bublitz and Hoffmann), the latter which has been found to share features of written and spoken language. The discourse genres covered are (dialogical) political interviews and (monological) political speeches (Fetzer), programmatic and topical texts (Kettemann and Marko), newspaper articles (Egg) and various genres of computer-mediated communication (CMC), such as weblogs and online discussion forums (Bublitz and Hoffmann). The phenomena analysed in these different genres include deixis (Fetzer), quoting (Bublitz and Hoffmann), discourse strategies (Kettemann and Marko), and rhetorical structure (Egg).

The article authored by Wolfram Bublitz and Christian Hoffmann is a good example of the growing number of linguistic studies which analyse some characteristic features of communication in the new media. With the spread of new technologies and the advent of new social networks and new forms of communication, this type of linguistic analysis has proliferated. Initially, such studies concentrated more or less narrowly on features which were considered new and unique to the genres in which they occur. Examples include, first and foremost, emoticons and also abbreviations such as "lol" for "laughing out loud" or "rofl" for "rolling on the floor laughing". Genuinely pragmatic investigations have, however, appeared only gradually, but are now increasing rapidly (cf., e.g., Meinel 2010, and Herring et al. forthcoming for an overview). This field is termed the **Pragmatics of Computer-Mediated Communication**. In their paper, Bublitz and Hoffmann concentrate on the meta-communicative act of quoting, which, as such, is a feature neither new in nor exclusive to CMC, but highly frequent and often essential in several CMC genres. Using material from a range of these genres, the authors explore the various forms and specific functions of quoting acts in CMC today.

Bernhard Kettemann and Georg Marko examine the fundamentalist discourse of the American Christian Right. In their analysis, they employ the method of **Critical Discourse Analysis** (CDA). CDA is a politically motivated approach to (usually written) discourse focused in particular on ideologies and social power as they are reflected and maintained in and through language use and, more generally, on the construction of social realities (cf., e.g., Wodak forthcoming, Bloor & Bloor forthcoming). In actual fact, CDA is not a recent trend in pragmatics, its roots going back to the late 1980s (cf. e.g., Fairclough 1989). What is new about Kettemann and Marko's study is their supplementing CDA with corpus linguistic methodology, thus balancing out some shortcomings of earlier work in CDA which can be characterized as purely qualitative, if not non-empirical. Based on a corpus of fifty texts, all

publically available on the internet, Kettemann and Marko identify three major strategies in American Christian fundamentalist discourse which they term 'intertextual immunisation', 'polarisation', and 'radicalisation'. While these strategies are not exclusive of the type of discourse under inspection (cf., e.g., political or scientific discourse), it is their combination and extensive use which make them distinctive features of fundamentalist discourse.

Anita Fetzer contrasts two genres – one monological, the other dialogical – of political discourse. These are political speeches on the one hand, and political interviews on the other hand. Her contribution thus illustrates a specific approach to the **Pragmatics of Spoken Discourse** or, more particularly, to the pragmatics of political discourse, and also to **Contrastive Genre Analysis**, where the term 'contrastive' does, however, not apply to comparing the same discourse genre across different languages (cf., e.g., Barron 2010), but to comparing two genres of the same discourse domain, i.e. here politics, in the same language. The focus of the present paper is on local deixis. Deixis is, in fact, a standard topic in all pragmatic traditions, broad and narrow (cf. section 1 above). Fetzer is, however, specifically interested in the strategic uses and functions of local deixis, notably of *here* and *there*. These she analyses in a corpus of speeches by and interviews with leading British politicians from three different political parties.

The final paper by Markus Egg represents a particular approach to the **Pragmatics of Written Discourse**. Specifically, an approach is adopted which is known as **Rhetorical Structure Theory** (RST) (cf., e.g., Taboada and Mann 2006). This theory can be employed as a framework for the description of discourse structures in terms of discourse relations which are used to combine smaller discourse units into larger ones. Using the material in the Discourse Graph Bank, a corpus of journalistic texts from American news media annotated for discourse structure, Egg examines cohesive links and parent structures in these texts, and also the impact of genre on discourse structure (i.e. expository versus persuasive texts). Unlike other authors who are critical of RST (cf., e.g., Wolf and Gibson 2006), Egg finds this particular theory sufficiently refined to capture the major complexities of structures in written discourse. Analyses of this type are often associated not only with the Pragmatics of Written Discourse, but also with text linguistic and discourse semantic approaches.

3. Concluding remarks

Overwhelmingly, the papers presented here report on empirical studies based on collections of data material, thus bearing witness to the fact that increasingly corpora of English are employed in major trends of present-day pragmatics and, in part, also corpus linguistic methodology. The data collections which are used include large publicly and/or commercially available electronic corpora, such as the British National Corpus (BNC), the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), or the identically designed and organised components of the International Corpus of English (ICE), as well as small, self-recorded corpora. This development, which may result in an independent research area which might be termed **Corpus Pragmatics**, is also reflected in the recently published introduction to pragmatics by O'Keeffe et al. (2011), a textbook entirely based on corpus material.

Another essential feature of current trends in pragmatics is the developing focus on variation. While the longer established applied disciplines of Contrastive, Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Pragmatics have dealt with pragmatic variation across different languages (in the case of Interlanguage Pragmatics usually with variation between the native and the target language of foreign language learners), the focus today is increasingly on pragmatic variation within the same language. This development includes variation across centuries and historical periods (Diachronic Pragmatics), variation across and within national, regional and social varieties of present-day language (Variational Pragmatics) or across and within mixed postcolonial communities in which second-language speakers of a language, such as English, may have different indigenous first languages (Postcolonial Pragmatics). This development further includes variation in the same speaker community and the same discourse domain (e.g. politics, journalism, CMC) across genres of spoken discourse (e.g. political speeches versus political interviews), across genres of written discourse (e.g. expository versus persuasive journalistic texts), and across genres of electronic discourse (e.g. weblogs versus online discussion forums). Finally, the trend also includes variation across discourse domains and communities of practice (e.g. Christian fundamentalist discourse versus political or scientific discourse).

All papers presented here remind us of the close relationship between language and culture, which are inseparably linked to each other. As Melchers and Shaw (2003, 134-135) observe: "Some aspects of pragmatics are linguistic. ... Other aspects are determined by culture rather than language. ... This distinction between culture and language is hard to maintain, however." Given this intrinsic connection, it seems perfectly legitimate to more precisely define linguistics as 'linguistic and cultural studies', by analogy to the widely used label 'literary and cultural studies'.

The papers presented here attest to the broad, originally Continental European perspective of pragmatics mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. This perspective is described more precisely by Verschueren (1999, 7) as "a general cognitive, social and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour ...". These three characteristics, Verschueren emphasises, belong together and interact whenever humans communicate. While the cognitive, social and cultural perspectives play different roles in the individual papers presented in the following, all papers underline the importance of these three aspects for the study of human communication, known, for short, as pragmatics.

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