

Pragmatics in
Language Teaching and Learning

语言教与学中的 语用学

钱秀芸 著



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Preface

Pragmatics has been studied for decades in western countries. That it is bound to attract a great amount of intellectual attention lies in that “pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society” (Mey, 2001). From the study, researchers discussed its definitions, its domains, and its possible functions in different fields of people’s life where the use of language is involved. In particular, the achievement of its study enlightens the education fields, as He Ziran (1997) once pointed out that learning a language is a process of cultivating pragmatic competence of the target language. People with pragmatic competence can perform a successful communication act because they use language appropriately and tactfully in a specific context, for which they are fiercely needed in our today’s China. Since China is developing more and more close links with the world, those people who are able to communicate with people from different cultures by using foreign languages both correctly and appropriately are needed. On the other hand, the study on Pragmatics accordingly corresponds with the goal of our today’s education system. It is well known that the ultimate goal of

foreign language education is to develop and cultivate learners' communicative competence, which consists of linguistic competence and pragmatic competence. Then, why Pragmatics is needed in language teaching and learning? And how are the pragmatic theories applied to achieve this goal? The answer seems to be clear: both our educators and language learners must get some knowledge about Pragmatics and apply the theory as a guidance to cultivate learners' pragmatic competence in foreign language teaching and learning with awareness. However, the situation in foreign language teaching and learning is far from satisfied. There exist the imbalance and disharmony between learners' linguistic competence and pragmatic competence, the latter falling far behind the former. Thus, the purpose of this book is to make Pragmatics known to all people whose life are involved in the use of language, especially to both educators and learners, and to provide them with the feasible and efficient ways by which educators can apply to train and teach their learners' pragmatic competence and linguistic competence as well; meanwhile, learners can apply to analyze and solve their problems consciously under the guidance of knowledge on Pragmatics so as to become successful communicators.

This book is comprised of 8 main sections: Fundamental Knowledge and Background; Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence in Classroom Teaching; Reviews on Study of Pragmatic Development; Integrating Pragmatic Competence Cultivation with Classroom Teaching; Integrating Pragmatic

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Competence Cultivation with Language Learning; Application of Pragmatics in Related Fields; Distinctive Terms and References together with 2 minor sections: Preface and Acknowledgements.

Section I is the fundamental knowledge about Pragmatics and pragmatic competence. In this section, a brief review on the development of Pragmatics is made with definition, classification of Pragmatics and Competence. Relation between linguistic, pragmatic and communicative competence is analysed and explored.

Section II attempts to make a scrutiny on the two relations about Pragmatics and pragmatic competence in classroom teaching. Based on the analysis, the readers can observe the significance of Pragmatics in cultivating pragmatic competence in classroom teaching.

Section III makes a brief review on the study of pragmatic development which focuses on its instructional effects.

Section IV and V, which are the core of this book, focus on cultivating pragmatic competence in language teaching and learning from the perspective of educators and language learners respectively, since educators and learners constitute the two major parts in foreign language education. In section IV, the “what and how” is provided for educators so that the readers can observe the roles of Pragmatics in language teaching and the feasible ways to apply the pragmatic theories to train their learners’ pragmatic competence. In section V, it attempts to provide the language learners with the feasible ways, by which

they are able to analyze and solve their problems consciously in improving their language skills under the guidance of pragmatic knowledge so as to become successful communicators.

Section VI analyzes the application of Pragmatics in related fields of people's life where the use of language is involved. The purpose here is to make readers further understand the highlights of Pragmatics, and experience how the theory can be applied to reasonably interpret the human language behavior.

In section VII, some distinctive terms which often puzzle people are presented.

Annotated bibliography is provided for readers as a reference for further study.

In short, the book is accessible to those who hope to get better understanding of the use of language under the conditions that they can read English literature independently, since the book is written in English.

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Section I Fundamental Knowledge and Background

Main Points:

This section is the fundamental knowledge about Pragmatics and pragmatic competence. In this section, a brief review on the development of Pragmatics is made with a detailed discussion on its definition, scope and classification. Relation between linguistic, pragmatic and communicative competence is analysed and explored after the definition and classification of competence is discussed.

Language is so valuable to the individual, so critical to the efficient functioning of human societies, and in itself so impressively intricate and profound in structure, that pragmatics which deals with the use of language, is bound to attract a great amount of intellectual attention. Then what is Pragmatics? Why does the study of Pragmatics lead to investigating the performance via using language? To answer

the question, we have to discuss the sense of Pragmatics and the relationship between Pragmatics and pragmatic competence.

1. Pragmatics

The word “pragmatics” derives from Latin “pragmāticus” and Greek “prāgmatikōs”, which relate to affairs of a state, an act, or deed. Longman Dictionary defines Pragmatics as the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used. From the interpretation, Pragmatics is obviously connected with the use of language, which belongs to that part of linguistics that tries to probe into those meanings over-loaded or beyond what is literally conveyed in concrete speech events and situations. Various scholars give different definitions which can be comprehended as follows:

* Pragmatics has its topics of those aspects of the meaning of utterance which can be accounted for by straightforward reference to the truth conditions of the sentence uttered (Levinson, 1983).

* Pragmatics is a level of linguistic description like phonology, syntax, semantics and discourse analysis. Like the other levels, it has its own theories, methodologies and underlying assumptions. It has its own foci of interest, which

may change over time, come to the fore or fade away completely (Thomas, 1995).

* Pragmatics is the study of the conditions of human language uses as these are determined by the context of society. A context which is primarily determined by society's institutions, is called societal and a context which is primarily created in interaction, called social (Mey, 1993).

* Pragmatics studies the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others (Crystal, 1987).

* Pragmatics can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations (Leech, 1983).

Yule defined Pragmatics as:

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. Pragmatics is the study of intended speaker meaning.

Pragmatics involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. It requires a consideration of how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they're talking to, where, when, and under what circumstances.

Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning.

Pragmatics explores how listeners can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning. This type of study explores how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated. We might say that it is the investigation of invisible meaning. Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said. (Since it is difficult to study human mind, it is the big disadvantage.)

This perspective then raises the question of what determines the choice between the said and the unsaid. The basic answer is tied to the notion of distance. Closeness, whether it is physical, social, or conceptual, implies shared experience. On the assumption of how close or distant the listener is, speakers determine how much needs to be said. Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance (Yule, 1996:3).

Chinese scholars such as He Ziran define Pragmatics as:

* Pragmatics deals with particular utterances in particular situations, and is especially concerned with the various ways in which the many social contexts of language performance can influence interpretation (He, 1997).

Pragmatics has been defined in various ways, there is still a lack of a clear, widely accepted definition of the term. It is hard to disentangle each of these various senses from

them, yet, if we study it from the viewpoint of education, the meaning of the word “pragmatics” can be controlled. In this sense, Pragmatics should be defined by taking into consideration a few dimensions in order to illustrate both the features and functions of the word. Hence our definition is: As a word, pragmatics is synonymous with “being practical”. Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation (Liu, 2000:382). Thus the development of using language properly is the most important goal of education.

1) History of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a relatively new branch of linguistics, but research on it can be traced back to the periods of ancient Greece and Rome. The idea has undergone development and changes since then. The development and changes can be mainly divided into 5 typical stages involving (the first use of term; outline of the shape; concretizing the study scope; pragmatic approach to linguistics and the establishment of pragmatics.) The modern usage of the term “pragmatics” was put forward in 1938, in the book “*Foundation of the Theory of Signs*” by the philosopher Charles Morris (1938:6), who showed concern to outline the general shape of science of signs, or semiotics. During the period following Morris’ original division of semiotics, the study of pragmatics was confined to the field of philosophy. Later the philosopher and

logician Rudolf Carnap followed his practice and conceived of pragmatics as involving “the intervention of the designate of the expression in addition to the relation of the users to the expression” (Carnap, 1956). He suggested that there are two different forms of analyzing the meaning of the expressions of a language. One belongs to pragmatics, that is, the empirical study of natural languages; the other is part of semantics, that is, the pure semantics, which studies the context-independent, stable meanings of words and clauses. Carnap considered descriptive semantics a part of pragmatics. Bar-Hillel made the study of pragmatics more concrete. He took the view that pragmatics is the study of language that contains indexical and deictic terms such as “I”, “here” “now”, etc. He argued that the real meaning of these terms could only be determined by the real situation in which the term is uttered. The first efforts at establishing a pragmatic approach to linguistics date back to the late 60s and early 70s, the philosophy of language produced two of the main theories underlying present-day pragmatics. The first one is Speech Act Theory originally formulated by the Oxford’s language philosopher John L. Austin. In a famous little book, edited and published after his death, “*How to do thing with words*” Austin (1962) pointed out that there are a number of utterances that do not report anything, but rather that the uttering of the sentence is an action. He stressed the

functions of speech as “Doing things with words”. The theory was later refined and extended by another language philosopher John Searle. The second is the Theory of Conversational Implicature contributed by H. Paul Grice. He pointed out his theory of implicature which was considered one of the central concepts in pragmatics in a 1975 article entitled “*Logic and Conversation*”. In 1980s with the rise of functional grammar, which stresses the function of language rather than its form, more linguists realized that the branches of linguistics are insufficient and many problems cannot be explained in other fields. There is a gap between theory and meaning, that is, there are differences between what the sentences say and what the sentences mean. They have found pragmatics useful and helpful in natural language understanding and using. After pragmatics entered the field of linguistics, it has become the important issue, great progress has been made in studies of pragmatics when a subject of cognitive science and social science in verbal and cultural communications are within the scope of interest in pragmatics, which was even extended further into the domain of education. Educator realized that the theory of pragmatics can be applied in fostering learners’ ability to use language properly, more studies about that accordingly are being produced.

2) Scope of Pragmatics

As one branch of recognized academic subjects, Pragmatics is a rich and exciting field with established theories, methods and sub-branches. Briefly, the micro-pragmatics and the macro-pragmatics are included in the scope of Pragmatics. The micro-pragmatics, also called the Anglo-American interpretation, includes the study of basic concepts as deixis, implicature, conversational implicature, conversational presupposition and structure, speech acts, conversational pragmatics; and the macro-pragmatics, which is also called the Continental interpretation, is much broader and includes discourse analysis, the ethnography of communication, some aspects of psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics. The development of pragmatics has made itself an area with immense research potential with a subject of cognitive science and social science in verbal and cultural communications in the scope of pragmatics. In a word, the scope of pragmatics includes all issues that are connected with the understanding and usage of a language.

3) Classification of Pragmatics

Pragmatics can be subdivided into Pragmalinguistics and Sociopragmatics, according to Leech and Jenny Thomas (1983):

Pragmalinguistics refers to the resources for conveying communicative acts and relational or interpersonal meanings.