Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology 4

Alessandro Capone
Jacob L. Mey *Editors*

Interdisciplinary Studies in Pragmatics, Culture and Society

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Editors

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Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology

Volume 4

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Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology deals with theoretical pragmatics and pragmatics from a philosophical point of view. The connection between philosophy and pragmatics is double. On the one hand, philosophy contributes to creating a framework to be called the 'pragmatics of language', capable of dealing with the interpretation of phenomena that complement purely semantic processes; on the other hand, pragmatics is capable of coping with major philosophical problems, e.g. skepticism and Gettier's problem. All volumes in the collection reserve a central place for the philosophical ideas in pragmatics, such as contributions to epistemology in which pragmatics plays a key role. The collection: Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology publishes: – pragmatics applied to philosophical problems and in the area of pragmalinguistics – pragmatics applied to the understanding of propositional attitudes, including knowledge, belief, in dissolving paradoxes and puzzles relating to epistemology. – pragmatics applied to psychology, especially on the topic of intentions and mind-reading – philosophical treatments of dialogue analysis. The collection does not accept in proposals on conversation analysis or discourse analysis, unless a connection with philosophical issues is made obvious.

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Acknowledgments

I dedicate this book to my two friends, Jacob L. Mey and Istvan Kecskes. They epitomize the best European scholarship and character. Their altruism and lack of self-absorption are the best examples they could give me. Since 2003, Professor Mey has been correcting, revising and shortening my papers on the plane or in front of his fireplace in Norway in the middle of snowstorms—I am grateful because through him a bunch of my papers was published in the *Journal of Pragmatics* and then in *Pragmatics and Society*. He also connected me with a number of influential people, including Igor Douven and Istvan Kecskes. On this occasion, he has accepted to lend me his strength (once more) and join me in an editorial project which was very ambitious and time consuming. Istvan Kecskes has been the best example I could follow (or try to follow)—an honest and decent man who recognizes and promotes originality in his editorial activities without being snobbish or sectarian. I will not easily forget the time we spent together in Sicily going around places like Marinello and the Eolian Islands. He invited me to many conferences, including the one in Malta in May/June 2014 and he has promoted my studies.

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lot to learn from him—such as the ability to help people without appearing to do so. This is really difficult to imitate.

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My friend Yan Huang taught me Gricean pragmatics. I have always been faithful to the spirit, though not to the letter of that teaching. Through him, I met my first and most respected philosopher, Paul Grice. I have also been taught neo-Gricean (Levinsonian) pragmatics as applied to anaphora. I will not forget his lectures and tutorials at Oxford and his green (Chinese) tea. I hope to be able to return all his esteem, encouragement and practical help by the consideration that without his support, I would not have obtained an Oxford Ph.D. and I would not have continued to write papers and books.

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Neal Norrick enjoys my great esteem and is a sad reminder that I could have written a lot on conversation analysis and I did not. However, by pushing this book I have partly remedied this fault.

Louise Cummings has demonstrated that linguistics and pragmatics can address societal problems and has set up an important example. She has always been positive and encouraging, and I wish to thank her for this. She has also demonstrated that one can be an outstanding scholar, without being snobbish.

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Introduction: Pragmatics, Linguistics, and Sociocultural Diversity

Alessandro Capone and Jacob L. Mey

We are pleased to introduce this new volume on *Pragmatics, Culture, and Society*. As Kecskes (2014) says in his introduction to his *Intercultural Pragmatics,* there are many works around on pragmatics and a new volume is (only) justified on the basis of some unique features that differentiate it from others. In this chapter, we want to explain to what extent the present book is different from other works dealing with issues in theoretical pragmatics.

We hope, and modestly predict, that our book will trigger further interest in the important issues addressed here—issues which are normally neglected in the linguistic syllabus, as (theoretical) linguistics is mainly concerned with the formal aspects of semantics and syntax, thereby being divorced more and more from societal linguistics. It is also our hope that our work will inspire further discussions and works on what broadly may be called "societal pragmatics," or a "pragmatics seen through the prism of society" (see Mey's article in the present volume). While a "social" or societally oriented pragmatics has been often the Cinderella of the linguistic syllabus, being taught only in those departments where there already is a (stronger or lesser) emphasis on sociolinguistic matters, we hope that one of the salutary effects of the present volume is to reverse this unfortunate trend. Considering that language, as stressed by Lo Piparo (2003), is at the heart of our social institutions (something that also the chapters below on language and the law amply demonstrate), the unhappy divorce alluded to above has dehumanized linguistics and probably led many linguists astray, making them devote their attention uniquely to the formal aspects of language and neglect language in its use in day-to-day communication among people.

As to its origin, the study of a social pragmatics can be partly found in the study of human behavior in general (by sociologists, psychologists, economists, rhetoricians, and so on), partly in the interest that linguists developed in the various forms of socially oriented and socially colored language use (such as dialects). With

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regard to the former, the scientific interest remained purely static-descriptive (as in the disciplines, now mostly obsolete, of sociometrics and sociography). In particular, the study of variation in language was either perceived against a historical background, or studied in the context of modern society; these interests crystallized respectively around the kernel disciplines of historical dialectology (with its emphasis on "Wörter und Sachen," in the tradition of the Swiss dialectologist Jakob Jud; 1882–1952), and around the burgeoning discipline of sociolinguistics in its extended form, where the object of study included not only the regional dialects of a language but also other socially stratified and gender-determined varieties of speaking, later augmented by an interest in professional speech, in religious and educational discourse, in infants', children's, and adolescents' talk, in forms of language use characteristic of certain current genres (such as texting and rapping), and so on.

It is customary to partition the union set of social, behavioral, educational, psychological, economic, and linguistic interests in language according to whether their practitioners consider themselves either as dealing with *linguistic* theories informed by a social, psychological, economical, etc. point of view, or with theories of the phenomena in question as subsumed under a *social* perspective. In the first case, we usually refer to these theories as belonging to *sociolinguistics,* while in the second case, we talk about the *sociology of language*. Unfortunately, this distinction, while practically motivated as a division of labor, does not make much sense in a wider, theoretical perspective. First off, the social linguistic phenomena can be theoretically distinguished, but not be separated in the real world. And then, the other way around, since all language presupposes a social formation, both for its origin and for its use, no human social formations can historically be imagined without implicating language and its users.

The early sociologists of language concentrated on description. According to the Nestor of North American researchers in the field, Joshua Fishman (1926–), what is needed is "a reliable and insightful description of any *existing* patterns of social organization in language use and behavior toward language" (Fishman 1972, p. 47; emphasis original). Such patterns are drawn upon in attitudes and policies towards phenomena such as bilingualism (Fishman 1972, pp. 52–53), in debates as to whether or not to influence language use and development through various policies, in particular when it comes to interfering with language attrition or language shift, and engaging in efforts to bring back languages from the brink of extinction (compare the current discussions on "endangered languages"). By contrast, in an early article, the British linguist John R. Firth (1890–1960) stressed the need to study what he termed the "context of situation" (Firth 1964, p. 66), a term that originally goes back to the Polish-British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), and was to echo in the work of sociologists, sociolinguists, and pragmaticists throughout the decades to come; the social semiotics of Michael Halliday (1925–) comes to mind as a prime instance. Firth's own notion of "serial contextualization" preludes on what Fishman came to call "the dynamic sociology" of language (1972, p. 51), a notion which comes pretty close to what we consider to be a social pragmatics. And finally, among the US sociolinguists who made their mark during the past century, one should not omit to mention John J. Gumperz (1922–2013), whose pioneering

work started as "advanced dialectology" (in his early work on local Norwegian ways of speaking), but eventually matured in his studies of "contextualization" that have built bridges across territories where few had wanted to go, in the intersection of linguistics and anthropology.

One other researcher who devoted his entire life to creating a synthesis of the two aspects mentioned here was the Frenchman Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002). Starting out from his personal experiences in Algeria during the independence wars, he gradually embraced a comprehensive view of human activity, rather than considering it a deterministic reaction of individuals to preestablished conditions and emerging stimuli; since "it is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of preestablished assemblies [or] models" (1979, p. 73).

Individual activity does not, by itself, lead to societal organization; the fact that people *act* in some kind of collectivity does not automatically index the presence of *interaction*. But in order to coordinate the activities involved in social practice, humans have to communicate; the development of language is related to this practice, in particular the tool-making and tool-using processes that are specific for human activity and depend on *communicative* interaction: that is, individuals interacting with (or sometimes against) one another, while communicating under the aegis both of nature and of what Jacques Rancière (1940–) has characterized as the "equalities and inequalities" that are the primordial parameters of any society, but in particular of our own, late-capitalist social formation (Rancière 1995, p. 19; see Mey 1985, Chap. 3.3).

A purely descriptivist model of studying human activity does not explain this societally initiated and oriented interaction; on the other hand, as Bourdieu remarks, "the truth of the interaction is never entirely contained in the interaction" (Bourdieu 1979, p. 81); rather, it is the conditions of society that vouchsafe and sanction the ongoing action, which always occurs in a climate of "equalities and inequalities." Only if these oppositions are resolved in common human interaction, a commonsense world, with a "*common*sensical" system of values, may be established. This value system is "taken for granted" by all, "endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning of practices and the world" (Bourdieu 1979, p. 80).

The "objectivity" that Bourdieu here mentions is not the kind of objectivity that we attribute to a scientific experiment; rather, it is located in what he calls the "objective intentions" of the interactive process, not to be confused with the subjective intentions of the interactants. For Bourdieu, the principle governing societal interaction is the human habitus, conceived of as the "internalization of [society's] objective structures as dispositions" (*ibid.*)—which, because they are not bound to a particular place or time or individual, are called "transposable" ("portable," as one would say today). The habitus is dialectically placed between the objective conditions, encountered as "nature" or "world," and the subjective categories through which we interpret them. The human activity aims at overcoming contrasting societal tendencies such as equality versus inequality, fact versus "view," personal preference versus the common good, immigrants as threatening aliens versus im-

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