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An Introduction to Cognitive Pragmatics

认知语用学导论

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前言

从研究语言到研究语言的使用是现代语言学的重要特征之一。语言作为人类重要交际工具,无时无刻不存在于人们的社会生活之中,是交流思想,抒发情感,沟通信息所必不可少的载体。研究不同语言交际环境下如何使用语言和理解语言的学科就是语用学。它从说话者和听话者的角度,把人们使用语言的交际行为看做是受各种社会文化因素制约的行为,研究特定语境中的话语含义,着重说明语境可能影响话语理解的各个方面,从而建立语用规则。

语言不仅是重要信息载体,也是人类的认知能力之一。人们进行言语交际的过程实质上就是认知的过程,即发话者明示自己的话语意图,听话者依据话语、语境假设,推导出发话者意图的过程。语用问题的认知研究是语言学研究的延伸和拓展。将交际视为一个认知过程,关注会话含义理解的认知参与因素及其作用,这就是认知语用学。语用学研究语言使用的规律,而语言符号本身是对认知方式的一种反映,是人们对客观事物的心理表征。因此,语用和认知密不可分。认知语用学就是根据认知科学的理论和方法来研究语言使用中的语用问题。

斯珀伯和威尔逊在合著的《关联性:交际与认知》(1986/1995)一书中提出的关联理论从认知心理的角度出发,认为交际理论又是一种认知理论,提出了明示—推理的交际模式,为认知语用学奠定了理论基础。本书在这一交际模式的基础上,详细探讨了认知语用学的背景与现状,研究方法,会话含义理论,各种交际模式的比较,认知语境,语用推理,明说与暗含,程序意义和概念意义,词汇语用以及关联理论对部分语言现象的解释力等问题,试图勾画出该学科的理论框架,反映出该领域的最新研究成果。同时本书用简明易懂的英语语言编写,以方便外语院系的研究生或语言学爱好者用作教材使用。

本书的编写始终得到著名语言学家王德春教授的关心和指导,叶慧君副教授给予了大力支持和帮助,部分研究生也提供了很有价值的素材



和例子,在此一并表示感谢。由于水平有限,纰漏和错误之处在所难免,欢迎专家和读者批评指正,不吝赐教。

语言学研究具有无穷的魅力。一旦走进这一迷人的殿堂,你会感到流连忘返,如痴如醉。因为语言学的研究就是透过语言现象,探讨人类的社会性、文化性和人脑机制,正像通过观察苹果落地这一现象,可以发现地球引力那样。走上语言学的教学与研究这条道路以来,作者每时每刻都被这一神奇的学科所吸引,以至于经常忘记了节假日和休息时间,忘记了疲劳和来自于各方的压力。特别是和同行学人进行专题讨论的时候,更是津津乐道,忘记了自我。虽然我们清楚地知道,我们所作的研究仅仅是浩瀚大海之中的点滴之水,微不足道,但是我们也希望这点点滴滴的成果能融入语言学研究的洪流之中,使其不断向前发展。

编者

2009年7月30日

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Chapter 1 Cognitive Pragmatics: An Overview

1. Introduction

Pragmatics is often described as the study of language use, in contrast with the study of language structure. In its broadest sense, pragmatics covers a range of loosely related research programs from formal studies of deictic expressions to sociological studies of ethnic verbal stereotypes. In a more focused sense, pragmatics contrasts with semantics, the study of linguistic meaning, and is the study of how contextual factors interact with linguistic meaning in the interpretation of utterances. In fact, the central problem for pragmatics is that sentence meaning vastly underdetermines speakers' meaning. The goal of pragmatics is to explain how the gap between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning is bridged. Approaches to pragmatics vary greatly from philosophical method to cognitive method. Here in this chapter, we will briefly highlight a range of closely related, central cognitive pragmatic issues and approaches, including the philosophical origins of the term pragmatics, the main contributions of cognitive pragmatics, the approaches to cognitive pragmatics, the relationship between cognitive pragmatics and cognitive linguistics and the developing trends of cognitive pragmatics. The main purpose of this project is to provide a framework of how people understand utterances from a cognitive perspective.



2. An Overview of Pragmatics

2.1 The Origin of the Term “Pragmatics”

Pragmatics, as many scholars describe, is an empirical science, but one with philosophical origins and philosophical import. References to pragmatics are found in philosophy since Charles Morris' *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* was published in 1938, in which pragmatics is defined as the study of the relations between signs and their interpreters. Before Morris, Peirce was the primary source of the contemporary philosophical conception of “semiotic” as a general theory of representation and interpretation. Peircean semeiotic derives ultimately from the theory of signs of Duns Scotus and its later development by John of St. Thomas. In Peirce's theory the sign relation is a triadic relation, a special species of the genus: the representing relation. According to Peirce, semiotic is a phenomenologically based and highly generalized critical theory — a logic with application beyond the traditional domain to which logic in the ordinary sense is restricted — and can also be understood to be a general theory of interpretation which provides analytical instruments applicable to representation and significance of every sort with no privilege of distinctively linguistic conceptions. Peirce's semiotic is primarily oriented toward communication rather than language, and is distinct from the semiotics (originally called “semiologie” or “semiology”) developed by extrapolation from the linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure.

Morris was concerned to outline the general shape of a science of signs, or semiotics. Within semiotics, Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry: syntactics, being the study of “the formal relation of signs to one another”, semantics, the study of “the relation of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable”, and pragmatics, the study of “the relation of signs to interpreters” (1938:6). In fact, Morris expanded the scope of pragmatics in accordance with his particular behaviouristic theory of semiotics (Black, 1947). According to Morris, the term “pragmatics” should deal with all the psychological, biological, and

sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs (1938: 108). Some scholars think the scope of pragmatics defined by Morris is too wide due to the fact that it would include what is now known as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics and much besides (Levinson, 1983).

Since Morris's introduction of the trichotomy syntax, semantics and pragmatics, the term "pragmatics" has come to be used in two very distinct ways. On the one hand, the tendency to use "pragmatics" exclusively as a division of linguistic semiotics has been retained, and this broad usage of the term, covering sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and more, is still being employed by many scholars. On the other hand, the term "pragmatics" was subjected to a successive narrowing of scope, especially within analytical philosophy. After Morris's version of trichotomy, the German philosopher and logician Rudolf Carnap in his book *Introduction to Semantics* reformulated the trichotomy as follows:

If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the 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 designation, we are in the field of semantics. And, finally, if we abstract from the designation also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax (Carnap, R. 1959).

Although Carnap mentioned at least four quite different senses of the term "pragmatics", the definition quoted above was finally influential.

2.2 Definition of Pragmatics

Levinson in his *Pragmatics* (1983) includes quite a few attempts to define pragmatics and no satisfactory result has been produced. Here we are not going to undertake this huge and almost impossible task of defining the term. We just intend to find out one of the most widely-used definitions, which is applied to the study of pragmatics. Now let's look at one of such definitions by Levinson:

Pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory. Or, as Gazdar (1979a: 2/12) has put it, assuming



that semantics is limited to the statement of truth conditions: 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. Put crudely:

PRAGMATICS=MEANING—TRUTH CONDITIONS.

This definition is more workable than a lot of others in that it delimits semantics within the statement of truth conditions and thus what falls out of semantics is within the scope of pragmatics. This is evidenced in the distinction of Grice's natural meaning and non-natural meaning, or say sentence meaning and speaker's meaning.

2.3 The Historical Development of Pragmatics

The trichotomy of semiotics by Morris produced a profound influence in the academic field, and naturally linguistics was the first to get this impact. Moreover, its influence on the 20th century linguistic philosophy was also significant as it based its research on the same framework. The development of modern linguistics thus witnessed a very active, mutual interaction and influence between itself and linguistic philosophy.

The famous slogan "meaning is use" proposed by the linguistic philosopher Wittgenstein indicates his pragmatic perspective in the semantic theory. Furthermore, his theory especially that of language-games had a great impact on J. Austin, whose William James lectures sheets at Harvard University in 1955 were collected and reprinted as a pamphlet entitled *How to Do Things with Words* in 1962. Later, American philosopher J. R. Searle made some amendments to Austin's Speech Act Theory and also further developed the theory. Searle published his book *Speech Act* in 1969 and the book *Indirect Speech Acts* in 1975, which are still the main research topics pursued by scholars both at home and abroad. However, it was the philosopher Paul Grice's William James lectures at Harvard in 1967 about "Logic and Conversation" (which appeared in 1975) that helped boost the development of pragmatics.

Pragmatics was established as an independent discipline with the publishing of the *Journal of Pragmatics* co-edited by Hartmut Haberland

and Jacob L. Mey in 1977. Afterward reinforcers or events that helped to strengthen pragmatics as a branch of linguistics include: Stephen Levinson's *Pragmatics* (1983); Geoffrey Leech's *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983); the publishing of the International Pragmatics Association's (IPrA) official *organs Pragmatics*, and *Pragmatics and Beyond*, under the care of its General Secretary Jef Verschueren; Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's *Relevance: Cognition and Communication* (1986, 1995); Jef Verschueren's *Pragmatics as a Theory of Linguistic Adaptation* (1987); Georgiana M. Green's *Pragmatics and Natural Language Understanding* (1989); Shoshana Blum-Kulka and Juliane House's *Cross-cultural Pragmatics* (1989); Steven Davis's *Pragmatics: A Reader* (1991); Gabriele Kasper, S. Blum-Kulka & J. House's *Interlanguage Pragmatics* (1992); Jacob Mey's *Pragmatics: An Introduction* (1993); Jenny Thomas's *Meaning in Interaction: An Introduction to Pragmatics* (1995); George Yule's *Pragmatics* (1996); and Jef Verschueren's *Understanding Pragmatics* (2002).

3. From Philosophy of Language to Cognitive Science

As is generally known, pragmatics came from the field of philosophy and since its appearance, whether as a discipline or a research method, its influence has been reaching various academic fields, making it a highly interdisciplinary subject. But one thing that should be born in mind is that despite the pervasive influence of the trichotomy of linguistics, there is no clear-cut boundary among the three sub-branches.

Broadly speaking, there are two perspectives on pragmatics: the “philosophical” and the “cognitive”. From the philosophical perspective, an interest in pragmatics has been largely motivated by problems and issues in semantics. A cognitive-science conception of pragmatics as a mental processing system responsible for interpreting ostensive communicative stimuli has effected a transformation in the pragmatic issues pursued and the kinds of explanation offered.

The term “cognitive pragmatics” has been used since the mid-1980s, but studies that fit this label have been made since the mid-1970s.



Theoretical work in pragmatics that can be incorporated into cognitive pragmatics has been done by philosophers since the 1960s. Some philosophical work has been done within cognitive pragmatics, setting a general theoretical framework for cognitive studies of language use. Linguistic theoretical systems have also been developed for the explanation of some major problems in pragmatics. A unified theory, which explains both the philosophical and the linguistic aspects of language use, is expected to emerge from such separate philosophical and linguistic studies. This cognitive approach to pragmatics is what we will adopt in the interpretation of utterances.

3.1 Gricean Philosophical Approach to Language

Grice took a philosophical approach to pragmatics. He was interested in such questions as what is meaning? What is it for a speaker to say, or assert something as opposed to implying it? How might a rational hearer decide what a rational speaker intended to imply? Grice introduced new conceptual tool—in particular the notion of implicature—in an attempt to reconcile the concerns of the two then dominant approaches to the philosophy of language, ideal language philosophy and ordinary language philosophy. Ideal language philosophers such as Frege, Russell, Carnap and Tarski studied language as a formal system. Ordinary language philosophers, including Wittgenstein, Austin and Strawson, studied actual linguistic usage, highlighting in descriptive terms the complexity and subtlety of meanings and the variety of forms of verbal communication. For ordinary language philosophers, there was an unbridgeable gap between the semantics of formal and natural languages. Grice showed that the gap could at least be reduced by sharply distinguishing sentence meaning from speaker's meaning, and explaining how relatively simple and schematic linguistic meanings could be used in context to convey richer and fuzzier speaker's meanings, which was made up not only of what was said, but also of what was implicated. This became the foundation of most modern pragmatics.

The main aim of Grice's approach is to explain how the hearer manages to recognize the best hypothesis about the speaker's meaning

from among all the linguistically and logically possible hypotheses. Grice's approaches have two foundational ideas. The first is that sentence meaning is a vehicle for conveying a speaker's meaning, and that a speaker's meaning is an overtly expressed intention which is fulfilled by being recognized. In developing this idea, Grice opened the way for an inferential alternative to the classical code model of communication. According to the classical view, utterances are signals encoding the messages that speakers intend to convey, and comprehension is achieved by decoding the signals to obtain the associated messages. On the inferential view, utterances are not signals but pieces of evidence about the speaker's meaning and comprehension is achieved by inferring this meaning from evidence provided not only by the utterance but also by the context.

The second foundational idea defended by Grice is that, in inferring the speaker's meaning, the hearer is guided by the expectation that utterances should meet some specific standards, that is, the best hypothesis is the one that satisfies certain expectations about what speakers are aiming at and what standards they are trying to meet. The standards Grice proposed are based on the assumption that conversation is a rational, cooperative activity. In formulating their utterances, speakers are expected to follow a Co-operative Principle, backed by maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner which are such that "in paradigmatic cases, their observance promotes and their violation dispromotes conversational rationality" (Grice, 1989: 370) (For more details, see Section 2.3, Chapter 2).

Actually Grice is not claiming that all conversations are co-operative, or that the maxims are invariably obeyed. Any speaker can opt out the Co-operative Principle, tacitly or overtly. Any speaker can accidentally or deliberately violate a maxim. He lists various ways in which the maxims may be violated and the consequences that result. For example, a lie is a covert violation of the maxim of truthfulness, intended to mislead; a metaphor is an overt violation of the maxim of truthfulness, intended to carry a figurative implication.

Grice's basic claim is that when an utterance has several linguistically



possible interpretations, the best hypothesis for the hearer to choose is the one that best satisfies the Co-operative Principle and maxims. Sometimes, in order to explain why a maxim has been (genuinely or apparently) violated, the hearer has to assume that the speaker believes, and is trying to communicate, more than is explicitly said. These extra bits of information are conversational implicatures, which along with presuppositions and illocutionary force, are widely regarded as the subject matter of pragmatics. Let's look at an example to illustrate how implicatures might be generated in Grice's framework:

(1) Steve: Are you going to the big party this weekend?

Sally: Didn't you hear that Bob is going to be there?

How does Steve interpret Sally's response depends on a certain context. For example, on the assumption that Sally likes Bob, the implied answer to Steve's question will be yes, whereas on the assumption that she wants to avoid Bob for some reason, the implied answer will be no. The fact that the listener presumably knows, for example, that Sally doesn't like Bob, then Steve can easily deduce that Sally really means that she won't be attending the big party this weekend. Grice argued with examples like the above that what Sally said only expresses part of what she meant by her utterance. Although Sally asked Steve a question as a response to his question, she was likely intended for Steve to understand that she either would or would not attend the party. This inference is derived from certain general principles or maxims of conversation that participants in talk-exchange are mutually expected to observe (Grice, 1975). When an utterance appears to violate any of these maxims, as Sally's response in the above exchange, listeners are expected to derive an appropriate conversational implicature as to what the speaker must have intended to communicate in context, given the assumption that he or she was trying to be cooperative (Gibbs, 1999).

3.2 The Main Problems of Grice's Approach

From the above example, Grice's theory seems to work well for the conversational implicature, however, this theory leaves many questions unanswerable. Firstly, Grice did not say much about why communicators use CP and maxims as the evaluation measure and not others. Secondly,

many of the terms in the CP and maxims are left unexplained. The clearest gap is the lack of a definition of relevance, which Grice himself acknowledged. Thirdly, his account lacks of an explicit comprehension procedure and offers no suggestions about how the process of looking for a satisfactory interpretation might be done. Fourthly, Grice's theory is restrictive. Grice drew a sharp dividing line between what was conversationally implicated and what was strictly said. Conversational implicatures made no contribution to the truth conditions of utterance, which were determined solely by what was said (Wilson & Sperber, 1998). Fifthly, Grice treated the comprehension process as a form of conscious, deliberate reasoning. In fact, understanding an utterance doesn't always feel like a deliberate conscious reasoning process, and his account does not fit well with recent work on "mind-reading", which treats pragmatic interpretation as an unconscious, spontaneous inference process (Sperber & Wilson, 2002).

3.3 Neo-Gricean Pragmatic Theory

Although Grice's theoretical terms are vague and leave many questions to be solved, we cannot deny his great contribution to the modern pragmatics, especially his inferential comprehension, which laid the foundation for the Neo-Gricean pragmatists and also regarded as the starting point for the development of cognitive pragmatics.

Neo-Griceans such as Gazdar, Horn and Levinson share Grice's view that inferential comprehension is governed by expectations about the behavior of speakers, but differ as to what these expectations are. Neo-Griceans stay relatively close to Grice's maxims. For instance, based on Grice's Quantity and Manner maxims, Levinson proposes Q-principle, I-principle and M-principle (For more details, see section 3.2, Chapter 2).

For many philosophers and linguists, an attraction of the Neo-Gricean program is its attempt to combine an inferential account of communication with a view of language strongly influenced by formal semantics and generative grammar. The aim is to solve specific linguistic problems by modeling pragmatics as closely as possible on formal semantics, assigning interpretations to sentence-context pairs without worrying too



much about the psychological mechanisms involved (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). Accordingly, Neo-Griceans have tended to focus on generalised conversational implicatures, which are “normally (in the absence of special circumstances)” carried by the use of a certain form of words (Grice, 1967/89: 37). For example, the utterance in 2a would normally convey a generalised implicature of the form in 2b:

(2) 2a. Some of my friends are philosophers.

2b. Not all of my friends are philosophers.

Levinson treats generalized implicatures as assigned by default to all utterances of this type, and contextually cancelled only in special circumstances. Particularized implicatures, which depend on “special features of context” (Grice, 1989: 37), cannot be assigned by default.

Neo-Griceans and formal pragmatists have little to say about particularized implicatures. The result is a significant narrowing in the domain of pragmatic research, which has yielded valuable descriptions of data from this domain, but is driven largely by methodological considerations.

3.4 The Emergence of Cognitive Pragmatics

The term “cognitive” is not a neology, which has been broadly used in the field of cognitive science since the early 1970s, to denote studies of the human mind and brain, done mostly by linguists, philosophers, psychologists and neuroscientists, within a certain framework. The major objective of cognitive science is an understanding of the human systems of knowledge, their acquisition, their psychological operation and their neural embodiments. It is assumed that abstract systems of knowledge, such as those of language, perception and reasoning, are characterizable independent of their concrete implementation. It was just the rapid development and maturity of cognitive science that provided the study of pragmatics with a new insightful perspective. The notion “cognitive pragmatics” has been used since the mid-1980s (Kasher, 1988), though, studies that fit this label have been made since the 1970s or rather in the 1960s if we include Austin’s work. In fact, theoretical work in pragmatics that can be included in cognitive