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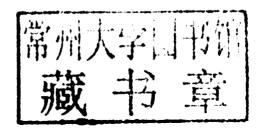
PRAGMATICS OF SOCIETY

Pragmatics of Society

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De Gruyter Mouton

Pragmatics of Society
HoPs 5

Handbooks of Pragmatics

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Volume 5

De Gruyter Mouton

Preface to the handbook series

Wolfram Bublitz, Andreas H. Jucker and Klaus P. Schneider

The series *Handbooks of Pragmatics*, which comprises nine self-contained volumes, provides a comprehensive overview of the entire field of pragmatics. It is meant to reflect the substantial and wide-ranging significance of pragmatics as a genuinely multi- and transdisciplinary field for nearly all areas of language description, and also to account for its remarkable and continuously rising popularity in linguistics and adjoining disciplines.

All nine handbooks share the same wide understanding of pragmatics as the scientific study of all aspects of linguistic behaviour. Its purview includes patterns of linguistic actions, language functions, types of inferences, principles of communication, frames of knowledge, attitude and belief, as well as organisational principles of text and discourse. Pragmatics deals with meaning-in-context, which for analytical purposes can be viewed from different perspectives (that of the speaker, the recipient, the analyst, etc.). It bridges the gap between the system side of language and the use side, and relates both of them at the same time. Unlike syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics and other linguistic disciplines, pragmatics is defined by its *point of view* more than by its objects of investigation. The former precedes (actually creates) the latter. Researchers in pragmatics work in all areas of linguistics (and beyond), but from a distinctive perspective that makes their work *pragmatic* and leads to new findings and to reinterpretations of old findings. The focal point of pragmatics (from the Greek *prāgma* 'act') is linguistic action (and inter-action): it is the hub around which all accounts in these handbooks revolve. Despite its roots in philosophy, classical rhetorical tradition and stylistics, pragmatics is a relatively recent discipline within linguistics. C.S. Peirce and C. Morris introduced pragmatics into semiotics early in the twentieth century. But it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that linguists took note of the term and began referring to performance phenomena and, subsequently, to ideas developed and advanced by Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin and other ordinary language philosophers. Since the ensuing *pragmatic turn*, pragmatics has developed more rapidly and diversely than any other linguistic discipline.

The series is characertised by two general objectives. Firstly, it sets out to reflect the field by presenting in-depth articles covering the central and multifarious theories and methodological approaches as well as core concepts and topics characteristic of pragmatics as the analysis of language use in social contexts. All articles are both state of the art reviews and critical evaluations of their topic in the light of recent developments. Secondly, while we accept its extraordinary complexity and diversity (which we consider a decided asset), we suggest a definite structure, which gives coherence to the entire field of pragmatics and provides

orientation to the user of these handbooks. The series specifically pursues the following aims:

- it operates with a wide conception of pragmatics, dealing with approaches that are traditional and contemporary, linguistic and philosophical, social and cultural, text- and context-based, as well as diachronic and synchronic;
- it views pragmatics from both theoretical and applied perspectives;
- it reflects the state of the art in a comprehensive and coherent way, providing a systematic overview of past, present and possible future developments;
- it describes theoretical paradigms, methodological accounts and a large number and variety of topical areas comprehensively yet concisely;
- it is organised in a principled fashion reflecting our understanding of the structure of the field, with entries appearing in conceptually related groups;
- it serves as a comprehensive, reliable, authoritative guide to the central issues in pragmatics;
- it is internationally oriented, meeting the needs of the international pragmatic community;
- it is interdisciplinary, including pragmatically relevant entries from adjacent fields such as philosophy, anthropology and sociology, neuroscience and psychology, semantics, grammar and discourse analysis;
- it provides reliable orientational overviews useful both to students and more advanced scholars and teachers.

The nine volumes are arranged according to the following principles. The first three volumes are dedicated to the foundations of pragmatics with a focus on micro and macro units: *Foundations* must be at the beginning (volume 1), followed by the core concepts in pragmatics, *speech actions* (micro level in volume 2) and *discourse* (macro level in volume 3). The following three volumes provide *cognitive* (volume 4), *societal* (volume 5) and *interactional* (volume 6) *perspectives*. The remaining three volumes discuss *variability* from a *cultural and contrastive* (volume 7), a *diachronic* (volume 8) and a *medial* perspective (volume 9):

1. *Foundations of pragmatics*
   Wolfram Bublitz and Neal R. Norrick
2. *Pragmatics of speech actions*
   Marina Sbisà and Ken Turner
3. *Pragmatics of discourse*
   Klaus P. Schneider and Anne Barron
4. *Cognitive pragmatics*
   Hans-Jörg Schmid
5. *Pragmatics of society*
   Gisle Andersen and Karin Aijmer

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Introducing the pragmatics of society[1]

Karin Aijmer and Gisle Andersen

Introduction

We endorse the view of pragmatics as "the cognitive, social and cultural science of language and communication" (Verschueren 2009: 1). Within this perspective, we refer to the study of language and communication in its social and cultural context as *sociopragmatics*. Sociopragmatics in a broad sense aims to show how social and cultural factors are brought to bear in language practices, and how they influence pragmatic strategies which are manifested by linguistic forms in particular communicative contexts. Some of the basic notions of pragmatics are speech acts, pragmatic markers and speaker attitude, relevance and implicature, discourse structure and coherence, presupposition and deixis, etc. Sociopragmatics does not approach these pragmatic phenomena as theoretical constructs or as cognitive phenomena *per se*, but aims to account for their instantiations in empirical socio-cultural contexts and to present cultural, social and situational differences in their manifestation. Among the concerns of this field is how linguistic forms can convey social or cultural meanings because of their close association with particular situations or situational dimensions.

Although the roots of sociopragmatics go further back (e.g. Lakoff 1975; House and Kasper 1981), the initial use of the term 'sociopragmatic(s)' stems from Thomas (1981, 1983) and Leech (1983), who, in fact, seem to attribute the term to each other. Thomas (1981, 1983) introduces the dichotomy between two different types of 'pragmatic failure', that is, observable breaches in pragmatic competence as seen for example in second language learners. Pragmalinguistic failure is the result of systematic pragmatic differences between the source and target language, "occurring when the pragmatic force mapped onto a given linguistic token is different from that normally assigned to it by native speakers" (Thomas 1981: 35). Pertinent examples would be when a non-native speaker fails to recognise the pragmatic force of an utterance such as the (in)appropriateness of the expression *good day*, or fails to recognise the indirectness of a certain speech act in the target language, such as *It's cold in here* meant as a request to close the window. Sociopragmatic failure, on the other hand, is due to culturally different judgements about what counts as imposition, about power and social distance, or about the relative rights and obligations of speaker and hearer. Thus, while pragmalinguistics concerns the appropriate linguistic means used for thanking, congratulating, requesting, etc., sociopragmatics concerns the appropriateness of these speech acts in different situations. Although this is certainly a useful distinction, we do not see it as

constitutive of the research field of sociopragmatics, which we perceive to be wide enough to include both concerns. In fact, we wish to maintain that any type of breach in pragmatic competence that can be explained by social, cultural or situational factors would belong to this research field. This is in line with the 'Continental' approach to pragmatics represented for example by the *Journal of Pragmatics*, the proceedings of the International Pragmatics Assocociation (IPrA) conferences, and Jacob Mey's (1993) social theory of pragmatics. Sociopragmatics in this wide sense is distinct from theories of pragmatics based in philosophical logic or cognition, such as relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995), which focuses on the cognitive processes involved in the interpretation of utterances, in strict isolation from their social context (dealt extensively with in Volume 4 of the *Handbooks of Pragmatics* series; cf. Schmid forthcoming). Notwithstanding the fact that cognitive or psychological realities have no place in Leech's model, we find his distinction between 'general pragmatics' and sociopragmatics useful; in fact we are concerned precisely with the "specific 'local' conditions on language usage" (Leech 1983: 10) that are excluded from general pragmatics but captured by his sociopragmatics notion, and with pragmalinguistics, "the more linguistic end of pragmatics – where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for a particular illocution" (Leech 1983: 11). In more recent years, sociopragmatics has developed primarily within the confines of historical pragmatics; a particularly notable contribution is the special issue of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (2009, 10.2) and its introduction by Culpeper (2009), who, in line with our approach, stresses that "sociopragmatics is not simply concerned with mapping regular patterns of usage in interaction, as might characterize much work in sociolinguistics, but with understanding how those regular patterns are used and exploited in particular interactions" (Culpeper 2009: 180f). Nevertheless, Culpeper (2010) rightly acknowledges that "sociopragmatics is not a well-recognised and agreed research area even within synchronic research" (2010: 69 in Volume 8 of the *Handbooks of Pragmatics* series; cf. Jucker and Taavitsainen 2010).

Our focus in this volume is exclusively synchronic. The subfield of sociopragmatics includes different strands of research which will be comprehensively explored in this chapter. As we see it, sociopragmatics encompasses interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982; Duranti and Goodwin 1992), linguistic anthropology (Hymes 1964; Duranti 2009) and variational pragmatics (Barron and Schneider 2005; Schneider and Barron 2008), and indeed several of the contributions in this volume take a *sociolinguistic perspective* to pragmatics, accounting for a number of social and situational dimensions along which pragmatic language features vary. Such studies focus on variability according to well-known macro-sociological variables such as age, gender, culture and regional provenance. However, the scope of sociopragmatics is wider, and the subfield also encompasses studies which take a stricter *pragmalinguistic perspective*. This research focuses

on specific pragmatic phenomena that are intrinsically sociopragmatic, a cardinal example being honorific expressions (Ide and Ueno, this volume), which cannot be accounted for without reference to the social roles of speaker and hearer. This phenomenon can be described in terms of its formal and functional manifestations and social significance. Moreover, sociopragmatics includes conversation analytical studies which take an *ethnomethodological perspective*. These studies seek explanations for variation by scrutinising the activity engaged in and the methods used by the participants to manage problems in the conversation, as well as the identities displayed as relevant in interaction. Conversational activities are often described in terms of the sequential organisation of talk rather than the external social characteristics of its participants. Finally, the subfield encompasses studies which take a *societal perspective* to pragmatics, investigating pragmatics with a more general socio-cultural focus that includes cross-linguistic comparisons of communicative behaviour, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and global and intercultural aspects of communication, such as multilingualism and lingua franca usage. The contributors to this volume are thus pragmaticians working on socio-cultural aspects of discourse and communication, as well as sociolinguists working on pragmatic and discourse aspects, applying a variety of complementary qualitative and quantitative methods and drawing from research traditions such as variational sociolinguistics, interactional phonetics and sociophonetics, corpus linguistics, conversation analysis (CA) and (critical) discourse analysis.

The study of pragmatics as the relationship between language and the social and cultural context goes hand in hand with a revival of interest in linguistic relativity, the idea that 'culture *through* language, affects the way we think, especially perhaps our classification of the experienced world' (Gumperz and Levinson 1996: 3). This idea, which can be traced back to Humboldt, Sapir and Whorf, was difficult to test empirically and was discredited by the emergence of the cognitive sciences in the 1960s. This resulted in a shift of research focus to the universality of language processes and to the innate human capacity for language acquisition (e.g. Chomsky 1965). However the hypothesis of language universality came to be questioned when a number of empirical studies by anthropologists showed that there were variations in language use which could only be explained by the cultural and social context. More recently it has been shown that cultural and social factors affect the use of language on different levels and in particular that contextual factors are associated with language use. The idea that the meaning, structure and use of language are socially and culturally relative is basic to interactional sociolinguistics, a hybrid discipline with a background in anthropology, sociolinguistics and pragmatics (see e.g. Gumperz 1982). What is needed is a "general theory of verbal communication which integrates what we know about grammar, culture and interactive conventions into a single overall framework of concepts and analytical procedures" (Gumperz 1982: 4; quoted from Schiffrin 1994: 99). Pragmatics, sociopragmatics, and indeed the current volume can be seen as contributions towards

this aim. In the following we describe different strands of sociopragmatic research and how the individual chapters of this book contribute towards this aim. The sections that follow correspond to the distinct parts of the book and to the thematic groupings of the individual chapters.

Social, regional and situational factors

The influence of sociolinguistics is seen from the focus on how socio-economic class, gender, age and ethnicity can explain linguistic variation. These categories have been shown in variational sociolinguistics to have a systematic impact on grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. However, sociolinguists have paid less attention to discoursal and pragmatic features associated with language in interaction. As a result of the growth of interest in pragmatic issues in general linguistics, there has also been more attention given to how pragmatic differences between languages can be explained by the impact of social factors.

The budding field of variational pragmatics (Barron and Schneider 2005; Schneider and Barron 2008) studies the influence of region on pragmatic phenomena at several levels. Not only dialects but pluricentric languages with several standards such as English, Spanish, German or French have subvarieties which may be distinguished by differences in usage. For example native speakers of Irish English may respond differently to thanks from British or American speakers (Schneider 2005). García's study (2008) of invitations in Peruvian and Venezuelan Spanish shows different intralingual varieties of Spanish use, and Muhr (1994) noticed pragmatic differences in apologising between Austrian Standard German and German Standard. Another situation is when language is used differently by speakers in post-colonial societies (cf. Barron and Schneider 2009: 425 on 'post-colonial pragmatics'). For example, in the Caribbean, pragmatic variation is due to the presence of both European and African traditions in the same society.

The notion of (social) macro-category continues to play an important role as shown in several contributions to this volume. However, the focus has shifted from the major demographic categories to how speakers use language to signal who they are and who they affiliate with through group membership. From a sociolinguistic perspective speakers are members of social networks and peer groups sharing much of their socio-cultural knowledge. The notion of communities of practice allows for a fine-tuned view of a peer group as an aggregate of people who come together around a shared purpose and who develop a shared understanding and a repertoire of semiotic resources through regular interaction. The contribution by **Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Anna Charalambidou** explores this notion through a focus on age as a distinguishing factor in discourse and social interaction. Their study is innovative in that it brings together two strands of research which have developed in considerable isolation, namely research on youth lan-

guage and research on ageing. It documents a shift in focus from normative ac-
counts, in which the language of young or old speakers is seen as deviations from
an adult norm – or even as 'deficient' – to more practice-based accounts which
show how age-related identities are negotiated in discourse. They propose that dy-
namic view of language use and the context can be combined with an interest in
social variation and suggest that we need an activity-based approach to language
and age research which also considers the sequential organization of the communi-
cation. This interest in activities and settings in sociolinguistic studies of age and
gender is to be welcomed and points out one direction in which sociopragmatics is
moving.

Further, the chapter by **Bróna Murphy** deals with the role of gender as an iden-
tity marker and explores how males and females use and interpret linguistic re-
sources in interaction. She gives an overview of an unbroken tradition of language
and gender research over four decades, pointing out significant shifts or 'waves' in
the research, characterised as the *deficit, dominance, difference* and *dynamic* ap-
proaches. The account shows how language and gender research has gradually
moved away from a reliance on binary oppositions and global statements about the
behaviour of men and women, to more nuanced and mitigated statements about
certain groups of women or men in particular circumstances. Murphy points out
the clear bias in research on gender and pragmatics towards studies of female lan-
guage use. Her own research contributes to remedying this by focusing on abusives
(swear words) in the context of casual conversation between male friends. Her
work looks beyond gender and compares speakers belonging to different age
groups in a corpus of Irish English. The results show differences between early,
middle and late adulthood in terms of abusive forms and their functional proper-
ties, reflecting how men in different life stages construct distinct gender identities,
e.g. as fathers, professionals and mature men. Abusives are clearly most commonly
used with social functions linked to camaraderie, social bonding, humour etc., and
are rarely intended as insults. In contrast with most previous literature in corpus-
based pragmatics, Murphy supplements her corpus-based findings with observa-
tions made in interviews with the same speakers.

María Elena Placencia is concerned with regional differences which are ex-
plored from a pragmatic variational perspective. She sets out to define and charac-
terise the notion of regional pragmatic variation as a subfield of variational prag-
matics in the tradition of Schneider and Barron (2008) and provides an overview of
earlier work on a wide range of pragmatic phenomena, including strategies for
face-threat mitigation, intensification, discourse organisation, opening and clos-
ing, address forms, discourse markers, laughter, etc. These phenomena are related
to the analytical domain which they belong to, specifically the illocutionary, dis-
course, participation, stylistic and non-verbal domains (Spencer-Oatey 2000), and
they are explored with reference to a variety of languages and national varieties,
with a main focus on Spanish, English and German.

The final chapter in this part of the book, by **Susanne Mühleisen**, also deals with region as a distinguishing factor, accounting for pragmatic verbal behaviour in a number of language situations that are characterised by multilingualism and the existence of parallel or competing norms of communication. She explicitly challenges the implicit equation "one language = one culture = one community", warning that pragmatic studies are in danger of relying on assumed universality in patterns of verbal behaviour (e.g. Brown and Levinson 1987). Even cross-cultural studies do not necessarily do justice to many language situations where more than one language is used by all members of the community or by part of the group, but may actually contribute to a production or reproduction of national stereotypes. She reviews the pragmatics literature on European multilingual countries (Switzerland, Belgium and Luxemburg), differences between Pakeha and Maori speakers in New Zealand and pragmatic variation in the Anglophone Caribbean. Her work shows, for instance, that in the complex diglossic Creole/English language situation of Caribbean countries, pragmatic variation does not correspond straightforwardly with certain linguistic or ethnic groups but is part of a complex negotiation of one's alignment with Creole versus English/European values and norms of communication.

The language system and pragmalinguistic features

The effects of pragmatic differences are observable at all levels of language. For example, honorifics in Japanese are indexically associated with social identity (Ide and Ueno, this volume). Other well-attested examples are pragmatic markers, conversational routines, interjections and taboo words, turn-taking and address forms. But pragmatic effects can also be witnessed in systemic language phenomena such as syntactic complexity and morphological variation, vocabulary, and a range of phonetic and prosodic phenomena, including phonatory, articulatory, intonational and rhythmic details.

Several of the contributions to this volume are specifically concerned with how the communicative context systematically constrains linguistic output. **Douglas Biber** investigates variation in language use according to the mode of communication by comparing a variety of spoken and written modes. He presents a synthesis of earlier work on a wide range of grammatical characteristics in seven academic and non-academic registers, including clausal structure, vocabulary, nominalisation, use of adjectives and adverbs, etc. His work shows that in spoken registers, communicative purpose is actually secondary to mode; whether a speech event is interactive and interpersonal (e.g. conversation) or monologic and informational (e.g. classroom teaching), it is characterised by the same set of linguistic features. Thus, classroom teaching has more in common with other spoken modes than with textbooks, although these two pedagogical modes share the same