

Discursive Pragmatics

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Discursive Pragmatics

Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights (HoPH)

The ten volumes of *Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights* focus on the most salient topics in the field of pragmatics, thus dividing its wide interdisciplinary spectrum in a transparent and manageable way. Each volume starts with an up-to-date overview of its field of interest and brings together some 12–20 entries on its most pertinent aspects.

Since 1995 the *Handbook of Pragmatics (HoP)* and the *HoP Online* (in conjunction with the *Bibliography of Pragmatics Online*) have provided continuously updated state-of-the-art information for students and researchers interested in the science of language in use. Their value as a basic reference tool is now enhanced with the publication of a topically organized series of paperbacks presenting *HoP Highlights*.

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Editors

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Volume 8

Discursive Pragmatics

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Preface to the series

In 1995, the first installments of the **Handbook of Pragmatics (HoP)** were published. The HoP was to be one of the major tools of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA) to achieve its goals (i) of disseminating knowledge about pragmatic aspects of language, (ii) of stimulating various fields of application by making this knowledge accessible to an interdisciplinary community of scholars approaching the same general subject area from different points of view and with different methodologies, and (iii) of finding, in the process, a significant degree of theoretical coherence.

The HoP approaches pragmatics as the cognitive, social, and cultural science of language and communication. Its ambition is to provide a practical and theoretical tool for achieving coherence in the discipline, for achieving cross-disciplinary intelligibility in a necessarily diversified field of scholarship. It was therefore designed to provide easy access for scholars with widely divergent backgrounds but with converging interests in the use and functioning of language, in the topics, traditions, and methods which, together, make up the broadly conceived field of pragmatics. As it was also meant to provide a state-of-the-art report, a flexible publishing format was needed. This is why the print version took the form of a background manual followed by annual loose-leaf installments, enabling the creation of a continuously updatable and expandable reference work. The flexibility of this format vastly increased with the introduction of an online version, the **Handbook of Pragmatics Online** (see www.benjamins.com/online).

While the HoP and the HoP-online continue to provide state-of-the-art information for students and researchers interested in the science of language use, this new series of **Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights** focuses on the most salient topics in the field of pragmatics, thus dividing its wide interdisciplinary spectrum in a transparent and manageable way. The series contains a total of ten volumes around the following themes:

- Key notions for pragmatics
- Pragmatics and philosophy
- Grammar, meaning and pragmatics
- Cognition and pragmatics
- Society and language use
- Culture and language use
- The pragmatics of variation and change

- The pragmatics of interaction
- Discursive pragmatics
- Pragmatics in practice

This topically organized series of paperbacks, each starting with an up-to-date overview of its field of interest, each brings together some 12-20 of the most pertinent HoP entries. They are intended to make sure that students and researchers alike, whether their interests are predominantly philosophical, cognitive, grammatical, social, cultural, variational, interactional, or discursive, can always have the most relevant encyclopedic articles at their fingertips. Affordability, topical organization and selectivity also turn these books into practical teaching tools which can be used as reading materials for a wide range of pragmatics-related linguistics courses.

With this endeavor, we hope to make a further contribution to the goals underlying the HoP project when it was first conceived in the early 1990's.

Jan-Ola Östman (University of Helsinki) &
Jef Verschueren (University of Antwerp)

Acknowledgements

A project of the HoP type cannot be successfully started, let alone completed, without the help of dozens, even hundreds of scholars. First of all, there are the authors themselves, who sometimes had to work under extreme conditions of time pressure. Further, most members of the IPrA Consultation Board have occasionally, and some repeatedly, been called upon to review contributions. Innumerable additional scholars were thanked in the initial versions of handbook entries. All this makes the Handbook of Pragmatics a truly joint endeavor by the pragmatics community world-wide. We are greatly indebted to you all.

We do want to specifically mention the important contributions over the years of three scholars: the co-editors of the Manual and the first eight annual installments, Jan Blommaert and Chris Bulcaen were central to the realization of the project, and so was our editorial collaborator over the last four years, Eline Versluys. Our sincerest thanks to all of them.

The Handbook of Pragmatics project is being carried out in the framework of the research program of the IPrA Research Center at the University of Antwerp. We are indebted to the university for providing an environment that facilitates and nurtures our work.

Jan-Ola Östman (University of Helsinki) &
Jef Verschueren (University of Antwerp)

Table of contents

Preface to the series	XIII
Acknowledgements	XV
Discursive pragmatics: A platform for the pragmatic study of discourse <i>Jan Zienkowski</i>	1
Appraisal <i>Peter R.R. White</i>	14
1. Introduction	14
2. Overview	16
2.1 Attitude – the activation of positive or negative positioning	16
2.1.1 Affect	16
2.1.2 Judgement	16
2.1.3 Appreciation	17
2.1.4 Modes of activation – direct and implied	17
2.1.5 Typological criteria	18
2.1.6 The interplay between the attitudinal modes	19
2.2 Intersubjective stance	20
3. Attitudinal assessment – a brief outline	21
3.1 Affect	21
3.2 Judgement	22
3.3 Appreciation	25
4. Engagement: An overview	27
4.1 Dialogic contraction and expansion	28
4.2 Further resources of dialogic expansion	29
4.2.1 Acknowledge	30
4.2.2 Entertain	30
4.3 Further resources of dialogic contraction	30
4.3.1 Pronounce	30
4.3.2 Concur	31
4.3.3 Disclaim (Deny and Counter)	31

- 4.3.4 Disclaim: Deny (negation) 31
- 4.3.5 Disclaim: Counter 32
- 4.4 Engagement resources – summary 33
- 5. Conclusion 33

Cohesion and coherence

37

Wolfram Bublitz

- 1. Introduction 37
- 2. Focus on form: Cohesion 38
- 3. Cohesion as a condition for coherence 40
- 4. Focus on meaning: Connectivity 42
- 5. Semantic connectivity as a condition for coherence 43
- 6. Coherence: A general view 44
- 7. A hermeneutic, context and interpretation based view of coherence 45
- 8. Coherence as a default assumption 47
- 9. Perspectives 47

Critical Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis

50

Ruth Wodak

- 1. Definitions 50
- 2. Historical note 53
- 3. Principles of CL 53
- 4. Trends 55
 - 4.1 Social Semiotics 55
 - 4.2 'Orders of discourse' and Foucauldian poststructuralism 58
 - 4.3 The socio-cognitive model 60
 - 4.4 Discourse-Historical approach 61
 - 4.5 Lexicometry 62
 - 4.6 "Lesarten" approach 64
- 5. Conclusion 65

Énonciation: French pragmatic approach(es)

71

Marjut Johansson & Eija Suomela-Salmi

- 1. Introduction 71
- 2. Historical overview – from the pre-theoretical to the present phase 72
 - 2.1 Origins and the pre-theoretical phase 72
 - 2.2 First phase: Forerunners 74
 - 2.2.1 Charles Bally (1865–1947) 74
 - 2.2.2 Gustave Guillaume (1883–1960) 78
 - 2.3 Second phase: Main theoretical foundation 80
 - 2.3.1 Emile Benveniste (1902–1976) 81

2.4	Third phase: Modern developments	85
2.4.1	Antoine Culioli (born in 1924)	85
2.4.2	Oswald Ducrot (born in 1930)	88
2.4.3	Jacqueline Authier-Revuz (born in 1940)	90
3.	Some basic notions	92
3.1	Enunciation and enunciator	92
3.2	Situation/Context	93
3.3	Subjectivity and deixis	93
3.4	Reported speech	94
3.5	Modality and modalization	95
3.6	Modalities of enunciation (modalités d'énonciation)	96
3.7	Utterance modalities (modalités d'énoncé)	97
Figures of Speech		102
<i>Manfred Kienpointner</i>		
1.	Introduction	102
2.	Ancient rhetoric	102
3.	Contemporary treatments of FSP	104
3.1	Definition of FSP	104
3.2	Classification of FSP	108
4.	Across the lines of discipline: The cognitive and communicative role of FSP	111
Genre		119
<i>Anna Solin</i>		
1.	Introduction	119
2.	Historical precedents	120
3.	Genre research in language studies	121
3.1	Sydney School	121
3.2	New Rhetoric	123
3.3	English for Specific Purposes	125
4.	Issues and debates	127
4.1	Genre as class	127
4.2	Stability of genres	129
Humor		135
<i>Salvatore Attardo</i>		
1.	Introduction and definition	135
2.	Referential and verbal humor	135

3. Semantics 136
 - 3.1 The isotopy-disjunction model 136
 - 3.2 The script-based semantic theory of humor 137
 - 3.3 'Longer' texts 138
4. The cooperative principle and humor 138
 - 4.1 Grice and Gricean analyses 138
 - 4.2 Humor as non-bona-fide communication 138
 - 4.3 Relevance-theoretic approaches to humor 139
 - 4.4 Informativeness approach to jokes 141
 - 4.5 Two-stage processing of humor 142
5. Conversation analysis 143
 - 5.1 Canned jokes in conversation 143
 - 5.1.1 Preface 143
 - 5.1.2 Telling 143
 - 5.1.3 Response 144
 - 5.2 Conversational humor 144
 - 5.2.1 Functional conversational analyses 144
 - 5.2.2 Quantitative conversational analyses 145
6. Sociolinguistics of humor 147
 - 6.1 Gender differences 147
 - 6.2 Ethnicity and humor 148
7. Computational humor 148
8. Cognitive linguistics and humor 149
9. Conclusion 149

Intertextuality

156

Stef Slembrouck

1. From 'literature' to 'text as a productivity which inserts itself into history' 156
2. Text linguistics on 'textuality' 157
3. Dialogism and heteroglossia in a social-diachronic theory of discourse 158
4. Vološinov, pragmatics and conversation analysis: Sequential implicativeness and the translation of the other's perspective 162
5. Synoptic and participatory views of human activity: Bakhtin, Bourdieu, sociolinguistic legitimacy (and the body) 165
6. Natural histories of discourse: Recontextualization/entextualization and textual ideologies 170

Manipulation	176
<i>Paul Chilton</i>	
1. The ancient technique of rhetoric	176
2. The twentieth-century nightmare of 'thought control'	177
3. Manipulation is not inherent in language structure	179
4. So let's look at thought and social action	181
4.1 Drumming it in	181
4.2 Ideas that spread	182
5. What might override the cheat-checker?	184
6. Conclusion: Manipulation and counter-manipulation	186
 Narrative	 190
<i>Alexandra Georgakopoulou</i>	
1. Narrative as a mode of communication	190
2. Referential properties	192
3. Textual properties	193
3.1 Narrative organization	193
3.2 Narrative evaluation	196
4. Contextual properties	200
 Polyphony	 208
<i>Eddy Roulet</i>	
1. Preliminaries	208
2. Polyphony in Bakhtin's work	208
3. Polyphony in Ducrot's work	212
4. The description of the polyphonic organization of discourse	215
5. The interrelations between polyphony and other dimensions of discourse structures	218
6. Conclusion	221
 Pragmatic markers	 223
<i>Karin Aijmer & Anne-Marie Simon-Vandenberg</i>	
1. The tradition and the present state of research on pragmatic markers	223
2. Defining the field	224
3. The terminology: Pragmatic marker or discourse marker?	226

4. Classification 227
5. Pragmatic markers and multifunctionality 228
6. Theoretical approaches to the study of pragmatic markers 229
7. Methodology 231
8. Pragmatic markers in the languages of the world 232
9. The diachronic study of pragmatic markers 234
10. The contrastive study of pragmatic markers 234
11. Pragmatic markers in translation studies 236
12. Pragmatic markers in native versus non-native speaker communication 236
13. Pragmatic markers and sociolinguistic aspects 237
14. Pragmatic markers and the future 238

Public discourse

248

Srikant Sarangi

1. Introduction 248
 - 1.1 Multiple readings of 'publicness' 249
2. The situation-talk dialectic: 'public' as a feature of setting vs. 'public' as a feature of talk 250
 - 2.1 (Socio)linguistic markers of public discourse 250
 - 2.2 Interaction-based approach 251
3. Goffman and the public order 252
4. Habermas and the public sphere 253
5. Transformation of the public sphere: Public discourse as mediated communication 256
 - 5.1 The state's role in the conflation of public and private discourses in contemporary societies 258
 - 5.2 Surveillance and control: Information exchange as a site of struggle 259
6. Pragmatic theories of information exchange and the public sphere: Towards a social pragmatics 260

Text and discourse linguistics

266

Jan-Ola Östman & Tuija Virtanen

1. On terminology 266
2. Historical overview 267
3. Important fields of study 269
 - 3.1 Information structure 269
 - 3.2 Cohesion 270
 - 3.3 Coherence 271

3.4	Grounding	273	
3.5	Discourse types and genres	274	
4.	Other trends	276	
5.	Applications	279	
5.1	Practical applications	280	
5.2	Acquisitional and diachronic studies	280	
6.	Final remarks	281	
 Text linguistics			286
<i>Robert de Beaugrande</i>			
1.	The rise of text linguistics	286	
2.	Some central issues	294	
 Index			297

Discursive pragmatics

A platform for the pragmatic study of discourse

Jan Zienkowski

University of Antwerp

Most introductions to the interdisciplinary fields of discourse analysis and linguistic pragmatics begin by emphasizing that there is no consensus on the meaning of these terms. Neither discourse nor pragmatics are straightforward concepts and it may be correct to suggest that only the most vague and the most general definitions are able to unite the variety of disciplines, researchers, research programmes, heuristics, methodologies, objects of investigation, and terminologies lumped together under these headings. A book title such as 'discursive pragmatics' might therefore be interpreted as an oxymoron consisting of two signifiers whose referents are diverse in both quantitative and qualitative senses of the term. In this sense, the usefulness – i.e. the pragmatic value – of the label discursive pragmatics may be called into question. Yet, I will argue that this notion holds great potential as an instrument for establishing a platform for inter-disciplinary and inter-theoretical cross-fertilization. In this sense, the usefulness of the term resides in its communicative potential for researchers who tend to view their activities as either pragmatic or discursive ways of approaching empirical language use.

Many of the topics, themes, theories and perspectives discussed in this volume would also fit in publications related to rhetoric, cognitive linguistics, semantics, studies on language acquisition, sociolinguistics, communication studies, philosophy, literature, and many other (inter)disciplinary fields. But whatever their focus, all of the contributions collected in this volume contribute in one way or another to the linguistic or discursive turns that have taken place throughout the humanities and social sciences since the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, they are all products of an increasing pre-occupation with pragmatic concerns related to functional and communicative language use conceived in terms of interactional processes and context generation. This point of convergence has generated an ever-growing number of eclectic studies of real-life discourse(s) described in terms of empirically observable language use. Such discourses may be defined in terms of topic (such as racism, ecology, doctor/patient interaction), genre (such as literature, scientific publications, newspaper articles), or function (such as narrative, manipulative, rhetorical), depending on the researcher's main interests.

In this introduction, I will trace the pragmatic features of the perspectives and approaches to discourse as presented by the various contributors to this book. However, this collective volume is far from exhaustive. I will argue that approaches to discourse such as those presented under the headings of post-structuralist discourse analysis, discursive psychology, or conversation analysis would also belong here. In some cases, there were good reasons to deal with them in one of the other volumes of the *Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights* series. In other cases, they represent gaps to be filled in future updates of the *Handbook*. This introduction does not explore the various potential areas of application of discursive pragmatics.

In their article on *Text and discourse linguistics*, Jan-Ola Östman and Tuija Virtanen point out that “*differentiating between discourse analysis, text linguistics, pragmatics, semiotics, and even linguistics has become a field of inquiry in itself*”. Neither their article nor this volume is intended to present an overview of this meta-field. Recognizing that the term discourse analysis is used in a rather restricted sense by some scholars, they advocate a perspective in which the notion functions as “*an umbrella term for all issues that have been dealt with in the linguistic study of text and discourse*”. With respect to the relationship between pragmatics and discourse studies, they note that a discussion has emerged around the question as to which notion is more general. Even though they prefer to think of pragmatics as the more general term, they emphasize that it is more productive to consider the debate as a matter of perspectives: “*Discourse and pragmatics have the same fields of interest, but different aspects in focus. Thus, discourse will typically require larger stretches of text or conversation, whereas for pragmatics this is not necessarily the case*”.

Such a perspective view is also relevant with respect to other approaches contained in this volume. For instance, *Critical linguistics and critical discourse studies* as discussed by Ruth Wodak can easily be viewed as constituting a perspective as well. Wodak conflates CL and CDA on pragmatic grounds and goes on to characterize “*CDA basically as a research program*” instead of a theory or a methodology. For her, CDA is first and foremost an approach the specificity of which can be defined in terms of a “*concern with power as a central condition in social life that may be indexed in language use*”. But ultimately, CDA is considered to be an “*approach*” characterised by interdisciplinary and problem-oriented principles. In the same sense, it is open to a multiplicity of theories, methodologies, and objects of investigation.

Interestingly, in his article on *Text linguistics*, Robert de Beaugrande describes the development of this approach in terms of three historical stages. He points out how text linguistics was initially an attempt to extend grammatical principles to texts and how from the seventies on this approach became increasingly preoccupied with textuality as a structure with both linguistic and social aspects. The most recent stage witnessed an increasing focus on textualization processes in the actual production and reception of texts. He goes on to suggest that these developments allow for a pragmatics which includes “*a ‘critical’ view of communication as an ongoing interaction*”.