PRAGMATICS

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PREFACE

To squeeze all that goes under the rubric of **pragmatics** within the confines of a linguistics textbook would be neither possible nor desirable. Consequently this book is quite conservative in scope and approach, and considers the main topics in a particular tradition of work. This is the largely Anglo-American linguistic and philosophical tradition that builds directly, for the most part, on philosophical approaches to language of both the logical and 'ordinary language' variety (an exception is the set of topics treated in Chapter 6, which has a sociological origin). In contrast, the continental tradition is altogether broader, and would include much that also goes under the rubric of *sociolinguistics*. But even within this much narrower field, this book is in some ways restricted, since its main aim is to provide an introduction and background to those topics that, perhaps largely for historical reasons, are central to the Anglo-American tradition of work in pragmatics. The would-be pragmaticist must understand these issues in depth, if he or she is to understand the background to a great deal of current research in both linguistics and philosophy.

One major way in which this book is perhaps innovative is the inclusion in Chapter 6 of a brief review of work in conversation analysis. Apart from its demonstrable importance for theories of language usage, work in conversation analysis contributes directly to many of the same issues that have preoccupied philosophers of language, and thence linguists, while employing a startlingly different methodology. So both despite and because of the fact that conversation analysis springs from a quite different tradition from the other topics reviewed, a summary of findings is included here. In the Chapter, I have presented explicitly a re-analysis of some issues in the philosophical theory of speech acts along conversation analytic lines,

but the reader should be able to spot a number of further re-analyses of material dealt with differently elsewhere in the book.

Nevertheless, the omission of certain topics from coverage in this book does warrant explanation. In the first place, a relatively narrow range of contextual factors and their linguistic correlates are considered here: **context** in this book includes only some of the basic parameters of the context of utterance, including participants' identity, role and location, assumptions about what participants know or take for granted, the place of an utterance within a sequence of turns at talking, and so on. We know in fact that there are a number of additional contextual parameters that are systematically related to linguistic organization, particularly principles of social interaction of various sorts of both a culture-specific (see e.g. Keenan, 1976b) and universal kind (see e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1978). Such omissions reflect the primary aim of the book, namely to provide an introduction to the philosophico-linguistic tradition, rather than to attempt an exhaustive coverage of all the contextual co-ordinates of linguistic organization.

Secondly, there are two particular topics omitted that are generally admitted to belong within a fairly narrow view of what constitutes pragmatics. One is the **topic/comment** (or **theme/rheme**) distinction. Terminological profusion and confusion, and underlying conceptual vagueness, plague the relevant literature to a point where little may be salvageable (but see e.g. Gundel, 1977). For example, whereas we may be told how to identify a topic in a simplex declarative sentence, we are never told how to identify the topics of a sentence of arbitrary complexity (i.e. we are never offered a projection principle). In addition there is reason to think that the whole area may be reducible to a number of different factors: to matters of presupposition and implicature on the one hand, and to the discourse functions of utterance-initial (and other) positions on the other. The other major omission is less defensible, namely the absence of systematic remarks on prosody, and intonation and stress in particular. The fact is that, given the clear importance of prosodic factors in pragmatics, the area is grossly understudied. There is disagreement even about the fundamentals of how such factors should be described, whether as discrete elements or variable ones, wholes (e.g. tonal contours) or parts (e.g. 'levels'), evidenced by quite different approaches on either side of the Atlantic. But if the way in

which the phenomena are to be recorded is unsettled, the pragmatic functions of prosodic patterns are really quite unexplored (see, though, e.g. Brazil, Coulthard & Johns, 1980). Future textbook writers will hopefully find themselves in a happier position. Meanwhile the omission should be recorded.

The reader may also be disappointed to find little reference to languages other than English (Chapter 2 is a partial exception). The problem here is that other languages, and especially non-Indo-European ones, have simply not been subjected to the same kind of analysis. This is the more regrettable because, from those investigations that have been done (e.g. Fillmore, 1975; Anderson & Keenan, in press; Sadock & Zwicky, in press), it seems likely that pragmatic organization is subject to very interesting cross-linguistic variation. But until we have much more information in hand, we can only guess at the universal application (or otherwise) of those categories of analysis that have been developed. In this respect, we can hope for significant advances in the next decade or so.

The book also contains no systematic observation and theory about the relations between pragmatics and syntax. There are, of course, theorists who hold, by theoretical *fiat*, that no such relations exist (Lightfoot, 1979: 43–4). The fact remains that there are clear interactions between the organization of syntactic elements in a clause and pragmatic constraints of various sorts (see e.g. Green, 1978a, 1978b; Givon, 1979a; Gazdar, 1980a). Two general issues arise here. One is how such interactions are to be described in models of grammar: should we think in terms of a syntax that can refer to pragmatic constraints (see e.g. Ross, 1975), or rather should we let the syntax generate pragmatic anomalies, which some pragmatic component can later filter out (see e.g. Gazdar & Klein, 1977)? Although current thinking would tend to prefer the latter solution, there have been few concrete proposals for such a pragmatic filtering device, and no serious assessment of the degree to which such a device would simply duplicate syntactic machinery. A second general issue that arises is whether these observable interactions have any systematic basis: can a pragmatic theory accurately predict just what kind of pragmatic constraints on what kinds of syntactic processes are likely to occur? That would certainly be a reasonable expectation, but at the moment we can only list an apparently heterogeneous collection of such constraints, of many different kinds. The present lack of

interesting answers to either of these questions motivates the light treatment of these issues in this book, although possible interactions between pragmatics and syntax will be noted in passing.

The acquisition of pragmatic aspects of language by children is also excluded from consideration here, partly on the grounds that the early work in this area (e.g. Bates, 1976) was derivative from, rather than contributory to, the basic concepts reviewed in this book. Recently, though, acquisition studies have begun to contribute directly to theoretical issues in pragmatics (see e.g. Ochs & Schieffelin, 1979) and a review of this work would be valuable in a volume of larger dimensions.

Finally, those whose linguistic sights extend back beyond 1957 may find the lack of reference to Malinowski, Firth and other 'proto-pragmaticists' peculiar. And of course, within the history of linguistics, pragmatics is a remedial discipline born, or re-born, of the starkly limited scope of Chomskyan linguistics (while in philosophy, the interest in language use can in part be attributed to reaction against the extremes of logical positivism and 'language reformism'). Pragmatics prior to 1957, it could be argued, was practised (if in an informal way) without being preached. By way of extenuation for this historical myopia, it could be said that this book is at least in line with the attitudes of most of the current practitioners in the field.

With these limitations recognized, this book will, I hope, be of use to advanced undergraduates, as well as more advanced researchers, in linguistics, literary studies, psychology, anthropology and other disciplines with an interest in language use, as a crystallization of issues presupposed, but rarely explicated in full, elsewhere. Even philosophers should find interesting the distortion of many philosophical ideas in a linguistic mirror.

A note on how to use this book

There is a logical progression through the Chapters in the sense that each presupposes concepts explained in earlier ones. However, the reliance on concepts introduced earlier varies: Chapters 2, 3 and 5 are relatively self-contained, and 6 could almost stand alone. But Chapter 4 will make little sense without having previously read Chapter 3. Deft use of the Subject index to clarify concepts previously introduced should allow most of the Chapters to be read alone.

Finally, the introductory Chapter constantly refers to Chapters ahead – it is hard not to presuppose many pragmatic concepts in discussing the scope and nature of the field. Indeed, if readers find the introduction hard going, they should read just the last section, then plunge into the body of the book, and return to Chapter 1 when puzzles arise about the general nature of the field.

Although I have tried to make this book self-contained, there is no doubt that readers will get more out of it if they already have some grounding in semantics in particular. Here two other books in this series should be helpful, viz. *Semantic Theory* and *Logic in Linguistics*. Where further reading on any topic is required, the many references will provide a guide, but two works especially will be of general use, namely Lyons, 1977a and Gazdar, 1979a. The most useful collections of primary sources are Cole & Morgan, 1975; Rogers, Wall & Murphy, 1977; Cole, 1978; Schenkein, 1978; Oh & Dinneen, 1979; and Cole, 1981. The bibliography by Gazdar, Klein & Pullum (1978) has listings for various pragmatic topics, and there is an annotated bibliography of pragmatics by Verschueren (1978). Articles on pragmatics now appear in most of the major linguistic journals, but the *Journal of Pragmatics* and the series *Pragmatics and Beyond* may be of special interest.

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NOTATION CONVENTIONS

(For elementary explications of logical symbolism see Allwood, Andersson & Dahl, 1977; for transcription conventions, used mostly in Chapter 6, see the Appendix to that Chapter.)

A, B, C	sentential variables (esp. Chapter 4)
p, *q*, *r*	sentential variables
$A(e_1)$	ad hoc notation for a sentential variable that indicates the occurrence of an expression e_1 in a sentence A
F, G	predicate constants, as in F(*x*); also predicate variables in section 3.2.6
a, *b*, *c*	individual constants; also persons in expressions like '*a* knows that *p*'
x, *y*, *z*	individual variables
∨	inclusive disjunction
⩒	exclusive disjunction
~	negation
→	material conditional
↔	biconditional
=	identity
≠	negative identity
∀	universal quantifier
∃	existential quantifier
∈	is an element of a set
{ }	sets
⟨ ⟩	ordered sets or n-tuples
⊩	entailment
⟩⟩	presupposes
+⟩	implicates
K	speaker knows that; thus K*p* = speaker knows that *p*

P	epistemic possibility for speaker; thus $Pp = p$ is compatible with all that the speaker knows
$\Box$	necessary; e.g. $\Box p$ = it is necessary that p
$\Diamond$	possible; e.g. $\Diamond p$ = it is possible that p
λ	lambda-operator (Chapter 4)
γ	gamma-operator (Chapter 4)

CONTENTS

I

The scope of pragmatics

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide some indication of the scope of linguistic pragmatics. First, the historical origin of the term **pragmatics** will be briefly summarized, in order to indicate some usages of the term that are divergent from the usage in this book. Secondly, we will review some definitions of the field, which, while being less than fully satisfactory, will at least serve to indicate the rough scope of linguistic pragmatics. Thirdly, some reasons for the current interest in the field will be explained, while a final section illustrates some basic kinds of pragmatic phenomena. In passing, some analytical notions that are useful background will be introduced.

1.1 The origin and historical vagaries of the term pragmatics

The modern usage of the term **pragmatics** is attributable to the philosopher Charles Morris (1938), who was concerned to outline (after Locke and Peirce)[1] the general shape of a science of signs, or **semiotics** (or **semiotic** as Morris preferred). Within semiotics, Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry: **syntactics** (or **syntax**), being the study of "the formal relation of signs to one another", **semantics**, the study of "the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable" (their designata), and **pragmatics**, the study of "the relation of signs to interpreters" (1938: 6). Within each branch of semiotics, one could make the distinction between **pure** studies, concerned with the

[1] Apart from this connection, there is only the slightest historical relation between pragmatics and the philosophical doctrines of **pragmatism** (see Morris, 1938 (1971: 43); Lyons, 1977a: 119). There have been recent attempts, however, to recast Morris's trichotomy in a Peircean (or pragmatist) mould, which are not covered in this book: see Silverstein, 1976; Bean, 1978.

elaboration of the relevant metalanguage, and **descriptive** studies which applied the metalanguage to the description of specific signs and their usages (1938 (1971: 24)).

As instances of usage governed by **pragmatical rule**, Morris noted that "interjections such as *Oh!*, commands such as *Come here!*, ... expressions such as *Good morning!* and various rhetorical and poetical devices, occur only under certain definite conditions in the users of the language" (1938 (1971: 48)). Such matters would still today be given a treatment within linguistic pragmatics. But Morris went on to expand the scope of pragmatics in accord with his particular behaviouristic theory of semiotics (Black, 1947): "It is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs" (1938: 108). Such a scope is very much wider than the work that currently goes on under the rubric of linguistic pragmatics, for it would include what is now known as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics and much besides.

Since Morris's introduction of the trichotomy syntax, semantics and pragmatics, the latter term has come to be used in two very distinct ways. On the one hand, the very broad use intended by Morris has been retained, and this explains the usage of the term *pragmatics* in the titles of books that deal, for example, with matters as diverse as the psychopathology of communication (in the manner of G. Bateson and R. D. Laing – see Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967) and the evolution of symbol systems (see Cherry, 1974). Even here though, there has been a tendency to use *pragmatics* exclusively as a division of *linguistic* semiotics, rather than as pertaining to sign systems in general. This broad usage of the term, covering sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and more, is still the one generally used on the Continent (see e.g. the collection in Wunderlich, 1972, and issues of the *Journal of Pragmatics*).

On the other hand, and especially within analytical philosophy, the term *pragmatics* was subject to a successive narrowing of scope. Here the philosopher and logician Carnap was particularly influential. After an initial Morrisian usage (Carnap, 1938: 2), he adopted the following version of the trichotomy:

> 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 designata, we are in the field of semantics. And, finally, if we abstract from the designata also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax.

Unfortunately Carnap's usage of the term *pragmatics* was confused by his adoption of Morris's further distinction between pure and descriptive studies, and he came to equate pragmatics with descriptive semiotics in general, and thus with the study of natural (as opposed to logical) languages (Carnap, 1959: 13; see the useful clarification in Lieb, 1971). But Carnap was not even consistent here: he also held (Carnap, 1956) that there was room for a **pure pragmatics** which would be concerned with concepts like *belief*, *utterance*, and *intension* and their logical inter-relation. This latter usage, now more or less defunct, explains the use of the term in, for example, the title of a book by Martin (1959). Thus at least four quite different senses of the term can be found in Carnap's works, but it was the definition quoted above that was finally influential.

Incidentally, already in Morris's and Carnap's usages there can be found a systematic three-way ambiguity: the term *pragmatics* was applied not only to branches of inquiry (as in the contrast between pragmatics and semantics), but also to features of the object language (or language under investigation), so that one could talk of, say, the pragmatic particle *Oh!* in English, and to features of the metalanguage (or technical description), so that one could talk of, say, a pragmatic, versus a semantic, description of the particle *Oh!*. Such an ambiguity merely seems to parallel the way in which the sister terms *semantics* and *syntax* are used, and to introduce little confusion (but cf. Sayward, 1974).

The idea that pragmatics was the study of aspects of language that *required* reference to the users of the language then led to a very natural, further restriction of the term in analytical philosophy. For there is one aspect of natural languages that indubitably requires such reference, namely the study of **deictic** or **indexical** words like the pronouns *I* and *you* (see Chapter 2). The philosophical, and especially logical, interest in these terms is simply that they account for the potential failure of generally valid schemes of reasoning. For example, "I am Greta Garbo, Greta Garbo is a woman, therefore I am a