Handbook of Pragmatics Highlights 3

Cognition and Pragmatics

Edited by Dominiek Sandra,
Jan-Ola Östman
and Jef Verschueren

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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*. Whether your interests are predominantly philosophical, cognitive, grammatical, social, cultural, variational, interactional, or discursive, the *HoP Highlights* volumes make sure you always have the most relevant encyclopedic articles at your fingertips.

Editors

Jef Verschueren
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Volume 3

Cognition and 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, philosophy and logic
- 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

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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 / Antwerp Center for Pragmatics 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)

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Perspectives on language and cognition

From empiricism to rationalism and back again

Dominiek Sandra
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1. Language and cognition: Defining aspects of human nature

'Language' and 'cognition', the two words from the title of the present volume, could both be used to characterize human beings. To the best of our knowledge, we are the only creatures on this planet to make use of a communication system meeting the complexity of natural languages. All research that has been done in the sixties and seventies of the previous century to assess the language capacity of chimpanzees converges on the conclusion that these animals can learn some 100 to 150 words but that they never achieve the level where they realize the symbolic status of these words. Words are not mere members in an associate pairing with the thing they refer to, but represent the concept behind these referents in some code system (e.g., speech, signs, ...). Nor did the animals succeed in constructing word strings in accordance with syntactic rules. Both symbolic behavior (Deacon 1997) and syntactic capacity (Chomsky 1965), which some researchers consider as a particular manifestation of symbolic representation at a higher organizational level (Deacon 1997; Langacker 1990; this volume), characterize human language. Hence, despite the many capabilities of great apes, they lack the capacity for natural language. In a *Science* paper thirty years ago, Herb Terrace and his colleagues critically analysed researchers' attempts to teach great apes to make use of language and concluded that they dismally fail when judged against the critical dimensions that define natural languages: "Apes can learn many isolated symbols (as can dogs, horses, and other nonhuman species), but they show no unequivocal evidence of mastering the conversational, semantic, or syntactic organization of language." (Terrace, Petitto, Sanders, & Bever 1979: 902). Today, no evidence has appeared to suggest that this conclusion needs to be changed.

Similarly, we seem to be the only species on earth that has the ability to use higher-order cognitive functions. Michael Tomasello from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig has done highly original work on chimpanzee intelligence. Thus far, the conclusion of this research programme is that these animals are a lot smarter than one might imagine, and in some respects even possess a theory of mind, i.e., the capacity to know what another member of their species knows (Call & Tomasello 2008). However, another conclusion is that their cognitive abilities fall far short of the cognitive skills that humans possess. In experiments probing chimpanzees' capacity to take advantage

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