

◆ 当代语言学新视野丛书 ◆

NOTES  
ON  
PRAGMATICS

语用学讲稿

何自然



南京师范大学出版社

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## PREFACE

As a teacher of English literary criticism, when I was asked to read over Professor Ziran's *Notes on Pragmatics* for problems with the language, I was prepared to correct occasional misuse of articles and typographical errors (typos). Instead, I discovered with delight that the brave new world of pragmatics is applicable not only to the shorter discourses which it usually studies, but also to such longer discourses as the novel. It is particularly helpful in studying the contribution of the author to the manner in which the reader responds.

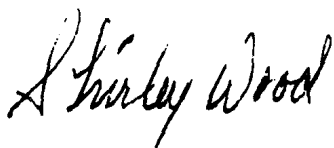
I found the book so interesting that I put aside my red pencil and read it through to the end. Then as I read it through again, red pencil in hand, I stopped frequently to make notes on items that could be useful in my own field. I am informing Professor He that I shall charge him a new copy of the book for myself, since I must return the marked copy to him.

Such a comprehensive review of theories across a broad field is necessary for students or researchers, whatever their special field. But it is no easy task to collect theories and order their arrangement so that the basis for each has been presented by the chapters before it, while later chapters summarize and develop ideas already elucidated. I must say Professor He has done this wonderfully well.

That this is done in Professor He's L2 increases my respect. After more than fifty years in L2 environment, I am daunted by the task of writing five pages of Chinese. Professor He has written 280 pages in English. I think our language researchers should learn from

## 2 *Notes on Pragmatics*

him. There is too much writing about English in Chinese. In fact, some language study journals do not publish articles in English. Lack of studies written in the language studied will affect international respect for us as language scholars. Used as textbook or reference, Professor He's book in fluent, easily readable English provides both terminology and example for younger scholars. I am sure they will welcome it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Shirley Wood". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'S' being particularly large and stylized.

Shirley Wood (吴雪莉)

School of Foreign Languages

Henan University

September 2, 2002

## FOREWORD

I learned pragmatics from Professor Steven Davis<sup>1</sup> at Simon Fraser University, B.C., Canada, in 1983, when I stayed for a whole year in Vancouver as a visiting scholar. Back to China, I began to teach pragmatics to my M.A. and Ph.D. students, organizing discussions on various topics of the subject. Since then, about 30 candidates in pragmatics under my supervision have submitted their theses, passed the oral examination, and gained the Master's or Doctor's Degree.

I collected all my lecture handouts and finally formed a term-course textbook in English, entitled *Notes on Pragmatics*, for M.A. students of Linguistics. I have had it mimeographed and distributed on campus once a year, adding to it some new contents from time to time. I also made a revision of this course-book in 1994, during my stay as a visiting researcher at the University of Durham, UK. I have published two books on pragmatics in Chinese before, but none was in English; my students and colleagues often encouraged me to have my *Notes on*

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Davis is Professor of Philosophy and Adjunct Professor of Linguistics. He is the author or editor of a number of books: *Philosophy and Language* (1976), *Casual Theories of Mind* (1983), and *Pragmatics: A Reader* (1991), etc.

*Pragmatics* published officially, but I hesitated to do so because there have been a number of very good textbooks on pragmatics abroad since the 1980's (e.g. Levinson 1983; Leech 1983, Green 1989/1996; Blakemore 1992; Mey 1993/2001; Thomas 1995; Grundy 1995/2000; Yule 1996; Verschueren 1999), and most parts of my lecture notes have directly benefited from these publications.

It was only recently, when Dr. Qiufang Wen of Nanjing University invited me to join in contributing to the Course-book Series of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, that I decided to have my mimeographed *Notes on Pragmatics* printed publicly. These lecture notes were used as a complement to my other two books on pragmatics written in Chinese for the M.A. course at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. Now this book, based on the lecture notes, covers the basic topics on linguistic pragmatics, or general pragmatics as Professor Leech puts it, as well as the topics heatedly discussed in class and partly published in the form of academic papers, such as hedging in discourse, structure of information, pragmatic vagueness, language use and social culture, pragmatics in translation, and so on.

Here I acknowledge with thanks the help of Professor Steven Davis,

who introduced me to pragmatics, a new sub-field of linguistics, and I am greatly indebted to Professor Shirley Wood<sup>2</sup> of Henan University, who was so kind as to be willing to write the preface for this book and who, as an astute teacher, pointed out my blunders in the manuscripts and gave me uncommon suggestions that have greatly benefited the book. I also owe my former student Dr. Wenhui Zhong and his wife Carol from Canada the great thanks for their patience to read through my lecture notes and made improvements in them. My thanks also go to my former ph. D. student, Dr. Chen Xinren, from Nanjing University, who helped proofread the manuscripts of the book. The completion of this book would have been extremely burdensome if it were not for the unfailing support of Professor Wen Qiufang and Ms Bai Li, to whom I owe much more than my friendship and gratitude.

He, Ziran

National Center for Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Guangdong  
University of Foreign Studies

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<sup>2</sup> Shirley Wood (吴雪莉), Chinese American, is Professor of English Language and Literature. She published her novel (*A Street in China*) in London, and was known as an outstanding translator of Chinese novels (Du Peng-cheng's *In Days of Peace*, Feng De-ying's *Bitter Herb*) and some Chinese official documents. As a scholar, she is the author of *Encyclopedic History of English Literary Criticism* (1997).

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## Chapter One

### Course Overview

#### ***Main Points:***

- Pragmatics is the study of the use of context to make inferences about meaning.
- Pragmatics is a study of language comprehension and application. It deals with the way of how to use language tactfully and understand it appropriately.
- Linguistic correctness alone doesn't help much in successful interaction. What is more important is appropriateness and tactfulness.
- As a relatively new branch of linguistics, pragmatics is undergoing rapid development. There are two trends towards the scope of pragmatics: micro-pragmatics and macro-pragmatics.
- Micro-pragmatics is the Anglo-American interpretation, which is the more restrictive one and the one more closely associated with the traditional linguistic concern with sentence structure and grammar.
- Macro-pragmatics is the Continental interpretation, which is much broader and includes discourse analysis, the ethnography of communication, some aspects of psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics.
- According to the Continental tradition, pragmatics is treated as a perspective on language; it exists at various levels of language, dealing not only with the theory of language itself, but also with other aspects having to do with its uses.
- Broadly speaking, pragmatics is made up of cross-cultural pragmatics, inter-language pragmatics, societal pragmatics, cognitive pragmatics, etc.

## 2 Notes on Pragmatics

Pragmatics, as a topic in linguistics, is the study of the use of context to make inferences about meaning. The term “pragmatics” was first introduced in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* by Charles W. Morris (1938), who contrasts it with semantics and syntax. For Morris

Pragmatics is the study of the “relations of signs to interpreters”, and semantics—the study of the “relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable”, syntactics—the study of the “formal relations of signs to one another.”

Morris’s use of “sign” here is a bit confusing, since syntax studies the grammatical relations of morphemes, which are not signs. If Morris’s “sign”, according to Steven Davis (1991), was replaced with “linguistic unit”, we could take Morris to claim that syntax is the study of the grammatical relations of linguistic units to one another, semantics is the study of the relation of linguistic units to the world; and pragmatics is the study of the relation of linguistic units to their users.

Below I’d like to elucidate what pragmatics is.

---

### **For more information, read:**

Morris, C.W. (1938), “Foundations of the Theory of Signs”, in *Writing on the General Theory of Signs*, (1971). The Hague: Mouton.

Davis, S. (1991), *Pragmatics: A Reader*, OUP, Oxford.

何自然 (1997), 《语用学与英语学习》, 上海外语教育出版社, 上海。

## **1. Pragmatics—Studies of Language Comprehension and Application**

Pragmatics deals with the way of how to use language tactfully and understand it appropriately. To master a language, it is not enough to