

外国语文教学与研究

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上海外语教育出版社

SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

特约编辑 林 剑
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本书是四川省高校外语教学研究会论文集,收入论文 47 篇,内容涉及语言学、教学法、翻译理论、文学评论、文化研究等诸多方面。论文理论基础扎实,观点新颖,代表了当前外语研究领域的热点,也体现了四川省高校外语教师的学术水准和他们通过科研来提高理论水平和整体素养的不懈努力。

序

继《外国语文教学与研究》第二辑出版以来,四川地区各高校的外语教师在教学和科研方面又有了许多新的成果,我们从中精选了一部分汇编成集,介绍给外语教学界的同仁。

本辑中收录了文学批评、文化研究、语言学、翻译和外语教学理论与实践等方面的四十余篇文章。这些文章从一个侧面反映了四川地区高校外语教师们正在从事的研究与实践工作。《大学英语课程教学要求(试行)》的颁布和实施推动了大学外语教学改革的深入发展。在教学改革的过程中,比如越来越多的教师结合教学实践,有的放矢地进行理论学习,积极探索教学的新路子,并把自己的思考和感悟付诸文字,一个教学与科研并重的风气已经渐渐在我省外语教师中形成。一个合格的高校教师不但应具有精湛的讲课艺术,还应有很强的科研能力。做科研、写文章促使我们对教学实践中的问题加以反省和思考,让我们带着问题去探讨,从而提高了理论水平和自身修养。在教学改革深入进行的过程中,我们还注意到一些好的现象,比如越来越多的教师根据教学和科研的共同兴趣形成科研团队,研究一些大的课题或开发新的教学模式,并编写新的教材;有的外语教师甚至探讨通过跨学科的合作来拓展教学的方法和内容。目前,我国高校的人才培养理念中十分强调学生的实际能力和创新思维的培养,在教师们的科研新成果中可以看到外语教学如何来体现这些新的教育理念。

在把这些新成果奉献给广大读者的时候,我们向长期支持外语教学改革和科研的上海外语教育出版社表示诚挚的感谢。

《外国语文教学与研究》编委会

2005年11月

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对语义学、语用学区分的传统观念的反思

Reflections on the Traditional Conceptions of the Distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics

摘要：语义学、语用学的区分是不容易讲清的难题。论文首先讨论了“语义学”和“语用学”这两个术语的定义和来源，然后考察了有关语义学—语用学的区分的各种相互冲突的传统观念。这些观念可分为两类，一类以语境独立性/语境依赖性为标准，另一类以语言意义/语言使用为标准。但是，笔者认为不能用这两个标准来区分语义学和语用学，以语言信息—超语言信息为标准的观念则更为适当。论文最后得出结论：语义学—语用学的区分反映了语言使用者所能掌握的语言信息和超语言信息之间的差异。语义信息在语法上与说出的语言材料相关，而语用信息则由说出这个语言材料的行为所产生。

关键词：语义学；语用学；区分；观念

Abstract: The distinction between semantics and pragmatics is not easy to explain. This paper first discusses the definitions of the two terms “semantics” and “pragmatics”. Then it examines the various and conflicting traditional conceptions of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. These conceptions can be classified into two types by using the criterion of context independence/context dependence and the criterion of linguistic (conventional) meaning/use respectively. However, the criteria do not provide the basis for drawing the distinction between se-

mantics and pragmatics. A better conception based on linguistic information and extralinguistic information is proposed. In the final part it concludes that the distinction between semantics and pragmatics reflects the difference between linguistic and extralinguistic information available to language users. Whereas semantic information is grammatically associated with the linguistic material uttered, pragmatic information is generated by the act of uttering that material.

Key words: semantics; pragmatics; distinction; conceptions

I. Introduction

In traditional linguistics the distinction between pragmatics and semantics and syntax on the one hand and, in a broader sense, between pragmatics and sociolinguistics on the other hand, depend wholly on Morris' general theory of signs (Morris, 1938). Some linguists hold that while semantics is concerned with the literal and contextually non-variable meaning of linguistic expressions or with the contextually non-variable side of the truth conditions of propositions or sentences, pragmatics deals with the function of linguistic utterances and the propositions that are expressed by them, depending upon their use in specific situations.

Although both semantics and pragmatics investigate different aspects of linguistic meaning, the task to distinguish between pragmatics and semantics is not easy. Whether a given phenomenon has a semantic or a pragmatic explanation or some combination of both must be settled on a case-by-case basis. Uncertainties arise with regard to issues such as whether deixis is a pragmatic or semantic phenomenon. As a way of placing utterances in contexts, deictic expressions are part of pragmatics, while as factors in establishing the

truth conditions of sentences, they are part of indexical semantics.

II. Two terms: Semantics and Pragmatics

1. Semantics

Semantics is the subdiscipline of linguistics concerning the analysis and description of the so-called “literal” meaning of linguistic expressions (Bussmann, 2000:423). The term “semantics” is a recent addition to the English language. “Semantics” did not occur until it was introduced in a paper read to the American Philological Association in 1894 entitled “Reflected Meanings: a Point in Semantics”. The French term “sémantique” had been coined from Greek in the previous year by M. Bréal. In both cases the term was not used simply to refer to meaning, but to its development — the traditional area of historical semantics of single words. In 1900, however, there appeared Bréal’s book *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning* which treated semantics as the “science” of meaning (Bréal, 1900). This book was not primarily concerned with changes of meaning from a historical point of view.

Under the influence of structuralism, semantics began to focus on the semantic relations between words and, thus, on the semantic structure of present-day vocabulary. With the development of generative grammar, lexically-oriented structuralist semantics was expanded to view problems concerning sentence semantics; the rivalry between interpretive semantics and generative semantics attests to the controversial state of research of the 1960’s.

More recent developments in semantics are characterized by an overlap within various areas of linguistic investigation. Semantics has become more and more a branch of an interdisciplinary “cognitive science”.

2. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a subdiscipline of linguistics developed from different linguistic, philosophical and sociological traditions that studies the relationship between natural language expressions and their uses in specific situations (Bussmann, 2000:374). The term “pragmatics” comes from Morris’ general theory of signs; in this semiotic model (semiotics), pragmatics refers to the relationship of the sign to the sign user. Pragmatics can hardly be considered an autonomous field of study (as is the case for phonology, for example).

In British-American linguistics, the term “pragmatics” has only been in use for a relatively short time; this area was previously subsumed under the term “sociolinguistics”. In the linguistic history, great importance has long been attached to the formal analysis of language and for a long time the study of the daily use of language is ignored and deserted. Pragmatics has long been considered as a wastebasket dealing with those phenomena that were not the business of semantics to explain. These phenomena later became the contents of pragmatics. In the early 1970’s, pragmatics became almost exclusively identified with speech act theory. Later it was concerned above all with empirical studies in conversation analysis, drawing on Grice’s maxims of conversation (Grice, 1975:22 – 58).

III. Reflections on Traditional Conceptions of the Distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics

1. Traditional Conceptions of the Distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics

To distinguish between semantics and pragmatics is a difficult task. Over the past years philosophers and linguists have proposed various conflicting conceptions. In this part, the traditional concep-

tions of the semantics-pragmatics distinction are reviewed in order of time:

- 1) Morris: “Semantics deals with the relation of signs to ... objects which they may or do denote. Pragmatics concerns the relation of signs to their interpreters” (Morris, 1938:35 – 43).
- 2) Carnap: “... who took a more general view and maintained that syntax is contained by semantics which is contained by pragmatics” (Carnap, 1948).
- 3) Ross: “The pragmatic analysis claims that certain elements are present in the context of a speech act and that syntactic processes can refer to such elements” (Ross, 1970).
- 4) Stalnaker (Stalnaker, 1972:383): “Syntax studies sentences; semantics studies propositions. Pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed. There are two major types of problems to be solved within pragmatics: First, to define interesting types of speech acts and speech products; Second, to characterize the features of the speech context which help determine which proposition is expressed by a given sentence. ... It is a semantic problem to specify the rules for matching up sentences of a natural language with the propositions that they express. In most cases, however, the rules will not match sentences directly with propositions, but will match sentences with propositions relative to features of the context in which the sentence is used. These contextual features are part of the subject matter of pragmatics.”
- 5) Montague: Montague suggests that “the difference between semantics and pragmatics is that semantic values are not relativized to anything, whereas pragmatic values are assigned relative to a context of use” (Montague, 1974).
- 6) Katz: draw the theoretical line between semantic interpretation

and pragmatic interpretation by taking the semantic component to properly represent only those aspects of the meaning of the sentence that an ideal speaker-hearer of the language would know in an anonymous letter situation, ... (where there is) no clue whatever about the motive, circumstances of transmission, or any other factor relevant to understanding the sentence on the basis of its context of utterance. (Katz, 1977:14)

- 7) Gazdar: “The domain of this pragmatic function is the set of utterances ... And we can treat the meaning of the utterance as the difference between the original context and the context arrived at by utterance of the sentence” (Gazdar, 1979:2, 4 – 5).
- 8) *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (1988:2062,1781): Semantics is defined as “the study of meanings; a branch of semiotics dealing with the relations between signs and what they refer to and including theories of denotation, extension, naming, and truth.” Pragmatics is distinguished from semantics and syntactics as “a branch of semiotics that deals with the relation between signs or linguistic expressions and their users.”
- 9) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*: “Pragmatics is the study of language which focuses attention on the users and the context of language use rather than on reference, truth, or grammar” (Fotion, 1995:709).
- 10) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Lycan, 1995:588): “Pragmatics studies the use of language in context, and the context-dependence of various aspects of linguistic interpretation. ... (Its branches include the theory of how) one and the same sentence can express different meanings or propositions from context to context, owing to ambiguity or indexicality or both, ... speech act theory, and the theory of conversational implicature.”

- 11) *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy* (Davies, 1996:124):
“The distinction between semantics and pragmatics is, roughly, the distinction between the significance conventionally or literally attached to words, and thence to whole sentences, and the further significance that can be worked out, by more general principles, using contextual information.”
- 12) George Yule (Yule, 1996:4): “Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. In this three-part traditional distinction, only pragmatics allows humans into the analysis. The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals, and the kinds of actions that they are performing when they speak. ... Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning. ... Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning. ... Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said. ... Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance. ... ”

2. Reflections on the Traditional Conceptions of the Distinction between Semantics and Pragmatics

According to the distinguishing criteria, the conceptions above can be classified into two types. The first type takes context independence/context dependence as the criterion; the second type takes linguistic meaning/use as the criterion.

In the first type, context is a key concept. As a comprehensive concept in communication theory, “context” refers to all elements of a communicative situation; the verbal and non-verbal context, the context of the given speech situation, and the social context of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, their knowledge and their attitudes. Some contextual information combines with linguistic information to determine content and some helps the

hearer to make inferences of linguistic meaning with the help of the circumstances and therefore determine the speaker's communicative intention.

Context is considered by many to be one element in pragmatics complementing semantics. However, as a matter of fact, in some cases such as indexicals, demonstratives and tenses, context is also an element in semantics, because in these cases the semantic content varies with context. It can be seen that it is not proper to use context independence/context dependence as a criterion to make the distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

The second type of distinction conceptions is based on the criterion of linguistic (conventional) meaning/use. That is, the distinction between the usual and conventional meaning of a word, a phrase or a sentence and the meaning of a word, a phrase or a sentence in specific circumstances. However, it is still not proper to use it as a criterion for the distinction between semantics and pragmatics because the literal meaning of some expressions is related to their use. The reasons are as follows:

The term "meaning" is a key concept in the study of semantics. There are different definitions and meanings for this term and different theoretical approaches result in different definitions of "meaning". According to Wittgenstein, the meaning of a word is its use in the language. In this theory of meaning as its use, meaning comes from various elements including the speaker, the hearer and the specific situation (Wittgenstein, 1953).

It was under the influence of this theory of Wittgenstein's that later J. L. Austin and Searle developed the speech act theory. According to this theory, speeches are acts which have illocutionary forces indicating the way the proposition is related to the words and the communicative function of speeches (Searle, 1969). A lot can

function as illocutionary indicators, such as tone, stress, intonation, accent, mood, particles, adverbs or adverbial phrases. For example, the adverbs “anyway”, “besides”, “finally”, “frankly”, “furthermore”, “however”, “indeed”, “moreover”, “otherwise” and the adverbial phrases such as “after all”, “at any rate”, “by the way”, “first of all”, “generally speaking”, “in conclusion”, “in other words”, “on one hand”, “on the other hand”, “strictly speaking”, “to begin with”, “to sum up”. The literal meaning of these words and phrases is related to their use since they are all commentary expressions in the discourse of utterance.

Therefore, a better and more satisfactory conception of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is needed. It should take into consideration the two criteria of context independence/context dependence and linguistic meaning/use, and should be based on the distinction between linguistic information and extralinguistic information. Semantic information is related to linguistic expressions, whereas pragmatic information is concerned with utterances and facts surrounding them. That is to say, pragmatic information is concerned with facts relevant to interpreting a speaker’s communicative purpose of making the utterance. Pragmatics is concerned with whatever information is relevant, over and above the linguistic properties of a sentence or other expressions.

IV. Conclusion

Linguists are not the only scholars that have been interested in the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. The subject has also been of concern to philosophers, and for a long time it has been important in methodology of both philosophy and linguistics.

In philosophers’ discussions, the distinction between pragmatics and semantics has long been a topic since it is one of their important

tasks to try to find out the distinction. For example, Strawson distinguished between linguistic meaning and speaker's meaning by holding that reference is something that speakers do, not words (Strawson, 1950:1 – 27). Austin distinguished between semantics and pragmatics by contrasting locutionary and illocutionary acts (Austin, 1960:93 – 101). Kripke contrasted semantic reference with speaker's reference by distinguishing between the referential use and attributive use of definite descriptions (Kripke, 1977).

In linguistics, because of the increasing recognition of the close interaction of meaning and use, semantics and pragmatics tend to be treated together as semantics in a broader sense. Despite the tendency to combine semantics with pragmatics, the linguistic distinction between semantics and pragmatics is still important. It can help distinguish between utterances in the strict and broad senses of linguistics, shed light on a number of other distinctions such as sentence vs. utterance, meaning vs. use, linguistic meaning vs. speaker's meaning, and help explain why the linguistic meaning of the sentence can only partly determine speakers' communicative purposes.

In conclusion, a better conception of the distinction between semantics and pragmatics is always needed. The distinction reflects the difference between linguistic and extralinguistic information available to language users. Whereas semantic information is encoded in what is uttered and is grammatically associated with the linguistic material uttered, pragmatic information is generated by the act of uttering the linguistic material and arises only in relation to the act of uttering that material.

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