13

Pragmatics

Language use in context

Yan Huang

13.1 What is pragmatics?

Pragmatics is one of the most vibrant and rapidly growing fields in linguistics and the philosophy of language. In recent years, it has also increasingly become a central topic in cognitive science, artificial intelligence, informatics, neuroscience, language pathology, anthropology and sociology. But what is pragmatics? Pragmatics can be broadly defined as in (1).

(1) Pragmatics is the study of language use in context.

However, though perhaps sufficient for the current purposes, such a definition may be too general and too vague to be of much use. This is because pragmatics is a particularly complex subject with all kinds of disciplinary influence, and few, if any, clear boundaries. In §13.3 I shall provide two different, though more detailed, definitions of pragmatics from two different theoretical points of view.

13.2 Why pragmatics?

There are many reasons for including pragmatics in an integrated theory of linguistics. Here, let me just discuss one or two of them.

13.2.1 Context dependence

Many, if not most, linguistic expressions of a language are context-sensitive in the sense that what they express is context-dependent. Consider (2)–(7).

(2) I like smoked salmon.

(3) You and you, but not you, stand up.

(4) It is raining.
(5) John is looking for his glasses.
    a. John is looking for his spectacles.
    b. John is looking for his drinking vessels.

(6) They are cooking apples.
    a. X: What are they doing in the kitchen?
       Y: They are cooking apples.
    b. X: What kind of apples are those?
       Y: They are cooking apples.

(7) The table is covered with books.

The interpretation of I in (2) and you in (3) – called a ‘deictic’ expression in linguistics and an ‘indexical’ expression in the philosophy of language – clearly relies on context. The reference of I (what the American philosopher David Kaplan called content) is essentially fixed by the contextual parameter determined by the stable meaning of I (what Kaplan called character). In other words, I is almost always used to refer to its user in a given context, thus called an ‘automatic indexical’ by the American philosopher John Perry. This has the consequence that the same linguistic expression I can be utilised to pick up different referents in different contexts. The three uses of you in (3) can be properly interpreted only by a direct, moment by moment monitoring of the physical aspects of the speech event in which the sentence is uttered. Unlike I, you is considered to be a ‘discretionary indexical’ because it involves the speaker’s intention. (4) contains a meteorological predicate rain. When it rains (at a given time), it usually rains at a particular place typically where the speaker is. Consequently, at least in some contexts (4) needs to be made location-specific. Next, (5) is a case of lexical ambiguity and (6), a case of syntactic ambiguity. In disambiguating them, contextual knowledge is often needed to select the reading the speaker has intended. For example, in (6), it is the relative linguistic context that distinguishes (6a) from (6b). Finally, the table in (7) is an incomplete definite description, whose descriptive content does not apply uniquely. In other words, the semantics of an incomplete definite description does not pick out some unique object. The computation of its referent is usually pragmatic in nature, determined by the speaker’s intention and its context. Other well-known cases of context-dependent expressions include terms with missing complements (8), relational terms (9), gradable adjectives (10), possessive constructions (11), constructions with missing quantifier domains (12), etc. (see also Bach 2012 for a more detailed list and for a different view).

(8) Mary is not slim enough [to be a fashion model].

(9) John is a friend [of the Obamas].

(10) John is tall [relative to an average European white man].

(11) John’s class.
    a. e.g. the class John teaches.
    b. e.g. the class John attends.

The linguistic material without the bracketed element in (8)–(12) is considered by the American philosopher Kent Bach to contain a propositional radical – a propositional fragment that does not express a complete proposition. Consequently, it cannot be evaluated truth-conditionally. Therefore, a propositional radical needs to be filled in contextually to be fully propositional so that it can be assigned a truth-value. For example, given a particular context, (8) can be completed to convey a minimal but full proposition such as the one expressed by the sentence with the bracketed material. However, whether the bracketed part in (8)–(10) and (12) contains a hidden indexical or an unarticulated constituent (UC) – a propositional or conceptual constitute of a sentence that is not explicitly expressed linguistically – has been a subject of heated debate among both philosophers and linguistic semanticists/pragmaticists, and the jury is still out.

### 13.2.2 Real-world knowledge

I consider next the role played by real-world knowledge.

(13) [Advice given by the British government during an outbreak of salmonella in the UK] Fried eggs should be cooked properly and if there are frail or elderly people in the house, they should be hard-boiled.

(14) a. the government’s drugs campaign.
    b. the government’s safe-sex campaign.

(15) a. My sister has brushed her teeth.
    b. My sister has visited the Great Wall in China.

(16) Anna had lunch at an Italian restaurant. The waiter was handsome.

In (13), given our real-world knowledge about who or what is or is not likely to be boiled, the preferred antecedent for they is eggs rather than frail or elderly people. (14) contains two noun-noun compounds. Again, by our common-sense knowledge, while (14a) means the government’s campaign against illicit drugs, (14b) means exactly the opposite, namely, the government’s campaign for safe–sex. Noun–noun compounds like (14) have long posed a challenge to Frege’s ‘principle of compositionality’. Next, (15a) is likely to be pragmatically enriched as the speaker’s sister has brushed her teeth this morning. By contrast, (15b) is likely to be pragmatically expanded as the speaker’s sister has visited the Great Wall in China at some point in her life. Both free enrichments are dependent on our (shared) belief about the world, in particular about our (shared) belief about teeth-brushing and sightseeing practices. Finally, (16) is an example of bridging cross-reference. It is via the addition of the background assumption that there are usually waiters/waitresses working in a restaurant that a link of association can be established between the waiter in the second sentence and an Italian restaurant in the first sentence. Put slightly differently, what is ‘bridged’ is not the information that is structurally retrievable but the information that is derivable from our real-world knowledge.

Clearly, the production and comprehension of sentences/phrases such as those in (2)–(16) involve pragmatic implication on the part of the speaker (imply/implicate) and pragmatic inference on the part of the addressee (infer). The same is also true of the following types of sentences.
(17) John’s blonde girlfriend has a brain.

(18) It takes time to complete a PhD dissertation.

(19) You are not going to die.

(20) Confucius is on the top shelf.

Both the brain-sentence in (17) and the time-sentence in (18) are trivially true. On the other hand, (19) is patently false. (20) is an example of deferred reference. In order to understand what the speaker of these sentences really intends to convey, all of them have to be pragmatically enriched and inferred.

13.2.3 Linguistic underdeterminacy

All this indicates that frequently, conveyed meanings systematically supersede literal meanings through pragmatic implication and inference. Putting it another way, certain linguistic phenomena can be handled only by recourse to extralinguistic, pragmatic factors such as context, real-world knowledge and implication/inference. In order to fill the gap created by linguistic underdeterminacy, pragmatics has to be included as a component in an overall theory of linguistic ability.²

13.3 Two main schools of thought in pragmatics

Currently, two schools of thought in pragmatics can be identified: the Anglo-American and the (European) Continental traditions.

13.3.1 The Anglo-American school

13.3.1.1 The component view

Within the Anglo-American conception of linguistics and the philosophy of language, pragmatics may be defined as in (21).

(21) Pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language. The central topics of inquiry include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, deixis and reference (e.g. Huang 2014).

This is known as the component view of pragmatics. On this conception, a linguistic theory consists of a number of core components: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Each of the core components has a relatively properly demarcated domain of inquiry. Pragmatics, then, is just another core component placed in the same contrast set within a linguistic theory. By contrast, other ‘hyphenated’ branches of linguistics such as anthropological, educational and sociolinguistics lie outside this set of core components. The component view of pragmatics is to some extent a reflection of the modular conception of the human mind, namely, the claim that the mental architecture of homo sapiens is divided roughly into a central processor and a number of distinctive, specialised mental systems known as modules.
13.3.1.2 Contextualism versus semantic minimalism in the philosophy of language

In recent years, there has been an ongoing, heated debate between contextualism and semantic minimalism in the Anglo-American philosophy of language and linguistics. The central tenet of contextualism is that contextual variations in semantic content can be accounted for in terms of a criterion of contextual best fit. According to this view, only in the context of an utterance does a sentence express a determinate semantic content. In other words, semantics covers only part of the way towards the production and computation of utterance meaning, and it is pragmatic enrichment and inference that complete the process as a whole. Two versions of contextualism can be identified: moderate and radical. Whereas the former acknowledges limited pragmatic influence on semantic content, the latter holds the view that pragmatic processes such as free enrichment play a central role in explaining contextual variations in semantic content. Closely associated with contextualism is the position known as truth-conditional pragmatics, namely, the view that various pragmatic processes in fluence and determine the truth-condition of a sentence uttered (e.g. Recanati 2010). Contextualism is represented by the work of the American philosopher John Searle, the Canadian philosopher Charles Travis, the French philosopher François Recanati, relevance theory and to a lesser extent neo-Gricean pragmatics.

In opposition to contextualism, the central thesis of semantic minimalism is that context is allowed only to have a very limited or minimal effect on the semantic content of a sentence. In addition, semantic minimalism holds that semantic content is entirely determined by syntax, that context sensitivity is grammatically triggered, and that it is not the job of semantic content to capture one’s intuitive judgement of what a speaker says when he or she utters a sentence. Currently, there are a number of variants of semantic minimalism. These include the British philosopher Emma Borg’s minimal semantics, the Norwegian philosopher Herman Cappelen and the American philosopher Ernest Lepore’s insensitive semantics, and Kent Bach’s radical semantic minimalism.

Next, there is indexicalism. This is the position in the Anglo-American philosophy of language and linguistics that assumes that there is a role for the speaker’s meaning to play in the determination of the truth-conditional content of a sentence, but only when a slot is set up by a sentence itself to be pragmatically filled in its logical form. To this end, a range of ‘covert’ or ‘hidden’ indexicals is posited to provide syntactic triggers for the additional context sensitivity demanded by contextualists, thus also referred to as hidden indexicalism. Only bottom-up but not top-down pragmatic influence is allowed to affect the truth-conditional content of a sentence. This position is represented by the work of the American philosopher Jason Stanley and the American linguist Zoltan Szabo. Interestingly enough, indexicalism is considered to be a version of moderate contextualism by semantic minimalists, and a form of liberal semantic minimalism by contextualists.

Finally, we have non-indexical contextualism developed by the American philosopher John MacFarlane. Contrary to indexicalists, non-indexical contextualists are of the view that context sensitivity called for by contextualists is not caused by the semantic content or truth-condition of a sentence but by a variation in its circumstances of evaluation. For instance, a sentence like (10), John is tall, is context-sensitive not because it expresses different propositions in different contexts, but because the truth or falsity of its occurrences depends on the circumstances in which it is evaluated. Consequently, the truth of a sentence has to be relevant, or relativized, to parameters of evaluation, hence this approach is also relabelled semantic relativism (see e.g. Huang 2013, 2014 for discussion of some alternative –isms in the current debate).
13.3.1.3 Central topics in Anglo-American pragmatics

With this philosophical background in place, let me move to the central topics of inquiry of Anglo-American pragmatics.

The notion of implicature (both conversational and conventional) was put forward by the British philosopher H.P. Grice. Conversational implicature is any element of meaning implied by a speaker and inferred by an addressee which goes beyond what is said in the strict sense. It is derived from the speaker’s saying of what is said by virtue of Grice’s cooperative principle and its attendant maxims of conversation (e.g. Grice 1989; Levinson 2000; Huang 2014). Since its inception, the classical Gricean theory of conversational implicature has become a foundation stone of pragmatic theorizing. Furthermore, it has provided a starting point for a staggering amount of research, giving rise to neo-Gricean pragmatics (e.g. Levinson 2000; Horn 2009; Huang 2014), relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), novel concepts like impliciture (e.g. Bach 2012) and the pragmatic enrichment of what is said (Recanati 2010), and interesting work in experimental pragmatics. In addition, classical and neo-Gricean pragmatics has been integrated with other current linguistic theories to bring about optimality-theoretic pragmatics and game- and decision-theoretic pragmatics. In contrast to conversational implicature, conventional implicature is a non-truth-conditional meaning that is not derived in any general, natural way from the saying of what is said, but arises solely from the conventional features attached to particular lexical items and/or linguistic constructions.

Presupposition is a proposition or a set of propositions whose truth is taken for granted in the utterance of a sentence. The main function of presupposition is to act as a precondition of some sort for the appropriate use of the sentence. This background assumption remains equally valid when the sentence that contains it is negated. Presupposition has long been considered a linguistic phenomenon that is balanced on the edge between semantics and pragmatics, but how much is semantics and how much is pragmatics is debatable.

The notion of speech act, introduced by the British philosopher J.L. Austin, refers to the uttering of a linguistic expression, the function of which is not just to say things but actively to do things or to perform actions as well. Speech act theory was established by Austin and after his death, refined, systematised and advanced by the American philosopher John Searle. It has since remained another cornerstone of pragmatics. Cultural and inter-language variations in speech acts have been major pursuits of cross-cultural and inter-language pragmatics (see §13.4.2). From a more formal perspective, the integration of speech acts with intentional logic has given rise to what is called illocutionary logic in formal pragmatics. Various aspects of speech act theory have also been formalised in artificial intelligence and computational pragmatics.

Deixis, or indexicality in the philosophy of language is the phenomenon whereby features of context of utterance or speech event are encoded by lexical and/or grammatical means in a language. There are three major categories of deixis: person, space and time. Person deixis is concerned with the identification of the interlocutors or participant roles in a speech event. Space deixis is the specification of location relative to that of the participants at utterance time in a speech event. Finally, time deixis is concerned with the encoding of temporal points and spans relative to the moment at which an utterance is produced in a speech event. There are also three minor categories of deixis: social, discourse and emotional. Social deixis is the codification of the social status of the speaker, the addressee, and/or a third person or entity referred to, and of the social relationships holding between them. Discourse, text or textual deixis is concerned with the use of a linguistic expression within an utterance to point to the current, preceding or following utterances in the same spoken or written
discourse. Emotional deixis encodes emotional proximity or distance between the deictic centre, typically the speaker and the entity referred to.

Finally, reference is a three-place relation that involves speakers, linguistic expressions and the entities the linguistic expressions stand for in the external world or in some mental representation. In other words, referring is an act of a speaker picking out a particular entity, denoted by the linguistic expression, in the outside world. It is performed through the speaker’s utterance of that linguistic expression on some particular occasion of use. Looked at this way, reference is essentially a context-dependent aspect of utterance meaning and it therefore falls within the domain of pragmatics (e.g. Huang 2014).

13.3.2 The Continental, perspective view

Within the European Continental conception of linguistics, pragmatics is taken to present a functional perspective on all core components and ‘hyphenated’ areas of linguistics and beyond.

(22) Pragmatics is a general functional (i.e. cognitive, social and cultural) perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour (Verschueren 1999).

This represents the perspective view of pragmatics, namely, the view that pragmatics should be taken as presenting a functional perspective on every aspect of the linguistic behaviour. More or less the same can be said of the definition of pragmatics provided within the former Soviet and Eastern European tradition, under which pragmatics (called ‘pragmalinguistics’) is in general conceived of as a theory of linguistic communication including how to influence people through verbal message. Consequently, within the wider Continental tradition, the empirical orbit of pragmatics has been considerably widened, encompassing not only much that goes under the rubric of non-core branches of linguistics such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and discourse analysis, but also some that fall in the province of neighbouring social sciences (see e.g. Huang 2014 for a critique of this school of thought).

However, there has recently been some convergence between the Anglo-American and Continental traditions. On the one hand, important work has been done on micropragmatic topics such as implicature, speech acts and presupposition from a Continental perspective. On the other hand, research within the Anglo-American conception has been extended not only to some core topics in formal syntax such as anaphora and the lexicon in lexical pragmatics but also to certain ‘hyphenated’ domains of linguistics such as computational, historical and clinical linguistics, giving rise to computational, historical and clinical pragmatics (see §13.4). This is also true in relation to cognitive science – an interdisciplinary amalgam of philosophy, psychology, linguistics, anthropology, computer science, artificial intelligence and neuroscience. One case in point is relevance theory, which has taken over many insights from cognitive psychology. Another case is the recent emergence of experimental pragmatics.

Each side of the Anglo-American versus Continental divide complements and has much to learn from the other. Whereas the strength of the Anglo-American school lies mainly in theory, and philosophical, cognitive and formal pragmatics, the Continental camp has much to offer in empirical work (empirical pragmatics), socio- (or social, societal), cross- (or inter)cultural, and part of inter-language pragmatics.
13.4 Macropragmatics

I move next to what is called macropragmatics – the study of the use of language in all aspects. Current topics of inquiry in macropragmatics can roughly be divided into three groups: (1) cognitively-oriented; (2) socially- and/or culturally-oriented; and (3) those that are not easily or neatly placed in the above two groups (see Huang 2013 for references for this section).

13.4.1 Group I: cognitively-oriented macropragmatics

This category includes cognitive pragmatics, psycho- or psycholinguistic pragmatics (including both developmental and experimental pragmatics), computational pragmatics, clinical pragmatics, neuropragmatics and part of inter-language pragmatics.

Cognitive pragmatics has its roots in the emergence of modern cognitive science in the 1970s. A typical example of cognitive pragmatics is relevance theory. Grounded in a general view of human cognition, the central tenet of relevance theory is that the human cognitive system works in such a way as to tend to maximize relevance with respect to both cognition and communication. Thus, the communicative principle of relevance is responsible for the recovery of both the explicit and implicit content of an utterance. Furthermore, it is hypothesised that pragmatics, which incorporates the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, is a sub-module of theory of mind, that is, a variety of mind-reading. Another significant cognitive approach to pragmatics is cognitive pragmatics theory developed by the Italian cognitive scientist Bruno Bara. Cognitive pragmatics theory offers an explanation of the cognitive processes that are involved in intentional verbal and non-verbal communication. The practitioners of the theory maintain that a ‘partner’ (addressee) in communication establishes the communicative intention of an ‘actor’ (speaker) by identifying the behaviour game that the actor intends him or her to play. Pragmatic phenomena are accounted for in terms of the complexity of the inferential steps that are needed to refer an utterance to a particular behaviour game and the complexity of the underlying mental representations. Cognitive pragmatics theory has been applied to studies of developmental pragmatics in children, the comprehension of pragmatic phenomena in head-injured subjects and pragmatic decay in subjects with Alzheimer’s disease. In these cases, it overlaps with clinical, neuro- and developmental pragmatics.

Psycho- or psycholinguistic pragmatics is the psycholinguistic study of aspects of language in use and mind. It is primarily concerned with the issue of how human beings acquire, store, produce and understand the use of language from the vantage point of psychology. Within psycho-pragmatics, developmental or acquisitional pragmatics studies the empirical development of pragmatic competence in children, utilising both observation and experiments. Next, deploying both psycho- and neurolinguistic methods, experimental pragmatics investigates, through carefully controlled experiments, such important pragmatic issues and theories as scalar implicature, felicity conditions on speech acts, reference, metaphor, neo-Gricean pragmatic theory and relevance theory. The term ‘experimental pragmatics’ has two senses. In its broad sense, it refers to any investigation through experiments of any phenomenon or issue that is considered to be pragmatic. By contrast, in its narrowest sense, the term makes reference to late 1990s and early 2000s developments in psycholinguistics, pragmatics and the psychology of reasoning that experimentally investigates a particular set of issues at the interface between pragmatics and semantics. The importance of psycho-pragmatics is that it has a crucial role to play not only in the...
formulation and development of pragmatic theories but also in the testing and revision of these theories.

Computational pragmatics is the systematic study of the relation between utterances and context from an explicitly computational point of view. This includes the relation between utterances and action, between utterances and discourse and between utterances and their uttering time, place and environment. Two sides to the question of how to compute the relation between linguistic and contextual aspects can be identified. On the one hand, given a linguistic expression, one needs to work out how to compute the relevant properties of context. On the other hand, in the case of language generation, the task is to construct a linguistic expression that encodes the contextual information a speaker intends to convey. Given the relevant properties of the context, one needs to work out how to compute the relevant properties of the linguistic expression. This study of the relation between linguistic and contextual aspects requires the building-up of explicit computational representations at either side of the relation. A particularly important topic of inquiry in computational pragmatics is inference. Abduction, the resolution of reference, the generation and interpretation of speech acts, and the production and comprehension of discourse structure and coherence relations have figured prominently in computational pragmatics.

Clinical pragmatics involves the application of pragmatic concepts, theories and findings to the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of pragmatic aspects of language disorders. It studies such pragmatic concepts and phenomena as Grice’s cooperative principle and its attendant maxims, implicature, speech acts, inferences, context, non-literal meaning, deixis and conversation/discourse – from a clinical perspective. Pragmatic deficits have been examined in a variety of clinical groups including children and/or adults with developmental language disorder, autism spectrum disorder, learning disability, left- or right-hemisphere damage of the brain, Alzheimer’s disease and schizophrenia. Insofar as most of these clinical groups are defined by an underlying neurological condition, and a large amount of research involves children, clinical pragmatics overlaps to some degree with developmental and neuropragmatics.

Neuropragmatics is a recently developed branch of pragmatics that examines the neuro-anatomical basis of language in use. It is concerned with the relationship between the human brain/mind and pragmatics. It investigates how the human brain/mind uses language, that is, how it produces and comprehends pragmatic phenomena in healthy as well as neurologically impaired language users. The majority of neuropragmatic research has focused on aspects of pragmatics in adults with identifiable clinical disorders and brain pathology. The brain-damaged populations include patients with left- and right-hemisphere damage, traumatic brain injury, neurodegenerative disorders like Parkinson’s disease and dementia and schizophrenia. This field of inquiry overlaps in particular with clinical and experimental pragmatics.

Finally, I come to inter-language pragmatics, which lies at the interface between pragmatics and second language acquisition. It studies how non-native speakers of a language acquire and develop their ability to understand and produce pragmatic features in a second language, i.e. an inter-language. The sub-branch of inter-language pragmatics that investigates the acquisition and development of pragmatic competence in children is called ‘developmental inter-language pragmatics’.
13.4.2 Group II: socially- and/or culturally-oriented macropragmatics

In the preceding section, I surveyed a number of branches of cognitively-oriented macropragmatics; in this section, I turn to the second group of branches of macropragmatics. This group includes mainly socio- (or societal) pragmatics, cultural, cross- (or inter)cultural pragmatics, and part of inter-language pragmatics. Institutional, interpersonal, postcolonial, and variational pragmatics and conversation analysis (CA) also belong to this category.

Sitting at the interface between sociolinguistics and pragmatics, socio- (or societal) pragmatics studies the use of language in relation to society. One topic that has long been the focus of sociopragmatic research is politeness. Politeness, broadly defined so as to encompass both polite friendliness and polite formality, is concerned with any behaviour including verbal behaviour of an interlocutor to constitute and maintain his or her own ‘face’ and that of the people he or she is interacting with. Defined in this way, politeness functions as a precondition of human communication (see Chapter 14). Since its publication in 1978, the American linguist Penelope Brown and the British linguist Stephen Levinson’s now classic ‘face-saving’ theory has generated a huge amount of research on politeness. On the other hand, interest in impoliteness has only surged recently, with 1998 being dubbed ‘the Year of Impoliteness’. By impoliteness is meant any face-aggravating behaviour relevant to a particular context. For some scholars, impoliteness has to be intentional (on the part of the speaker) and has to be perceived or constructed as intentional (on the part of the addressee). For others, intentions play no part in impoliteness. If intentions and recognition of intentions are involved, then rudeness rather than impoliteness occurs. In the British linguist Jonathan Culpeper’s work (2011), impoliteness has been classified into three types: (1) affective; (2) coercive; and (3) entertaining. Other topics that have attracted attention in sociopragmatics include social deixis, social conventions on the performance of speech acts and social factors which constrain language in use such as the overriding of conversational implicature by the Malagasy taboo on exact identification. From a macro point of view, the hand of societal pragmatics can be detected in any area that pertains in any way to society, dealing with topics as diverse as language in education, pragmatics and social struggle and what is called critical pragmatics. Critical pragmatics refers to the work done in sociopragmatics that follows the tradition of critical linguistics, in particular critical discourse analysis. Like in critical discourse analysis, in critical pragmatics, great emphasis is put on the relationship between language and social power and between language and ideology.

Institutional pragmatics refers to an area of research in pragmatics which investigates the use of language in social institutions and institutionalised contexts such as courtroom interaction, job interviews and police interrogation.

Cultural pragmatics, sometimes also known as anthropological or ethnographic pragmatics, is the systematic study of language use and its place in the functioning of human communities and institutions from a cultural or anthropological view, especially but not exclusively focusing on non-Western cultures. It overlaps with the ethnography of communication and ethnography of speaking. A particular variety of cultural pragmatics is ethnopragmatics. Ethnopragmatics is an approach to language in use that is semantically grounded in natural semantic metalanguage developed by the Australian linguist Anna Wierzbicka and her colleagues. It endeavours to find out more about speech practices and language use of particular, local cultures, contextualised and understood in terms of the beliefs, norms and values of speakers themselves.

Somewhat similar to ethnopragmatics is ethnographic pragmatics defined in its narrowest sense. It refers to the ethnographically-oriented approach to context-sensitive language use...
associated particularly with the work of Michael Silverstein and his students. Research conducted in ethnographic pragmatics has concentrated on non-Western cultures, societies and languages.

A third variety of cultural pragmatics is emancipatory pragmatics. A recently emerged research framework, emancipatory pragmatics attempts to free the study of language in use from the confines of the theoretical and methodological orthodoxies grounded in the dominant thought and practice derived from Anglo-American and European languages and ways of speaking, with the attendant premises of individualism, rationality and market economy, thus the term ‘emancipatory’. The focus of emancipatory pragmatics is also placed on non-Western languages and ways of speaking and on describing a language and/or culture strictly in its own terms.

Somewhat overlapping with socio- and cultural pragmatics is interpersonal pragmatics. Interpersonal pragmatics is a research arena that concentrates on the interpersonal and relational aspects of language in use, especially of how interlocutors utilise language to establish and maintain social relations, and how interactions between interlocutors both affect and are affected by their own and others’ understanding of culture, society, etc.

Cross-(or inter)cultural pragmatics is the systematic study of the use of language across different cultures and languages. Since the 1980s, a principal concern of cross-cultural pragmatics has been the issue of how particular kinds of speech acts, especially such face-threatening acts (FTAs) as requests, apologies and complaints, are realised across different cultures and languages. One of the most influential investigations is the large-scale Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Patterns Project carried out in the 1980s. In this project, the realisation patterns of requesting and apologizing in a number of languages were compared and contrasted. Since then, strategies for the performance of a variety of FTAs in a much wider range of languages have been examined. As a result of these studies, it has now been established that there is indeed extensive cross-cultural/linguistic variation in directness/indirectness in the expression of speech acts, especially in FTAs, and that these differences are generally associated with the different means that different languages utilise to realise speech acts. These findings have undoubtedly contributed to our greater understanding of cross-cultural/linguistic similarities and differences in face-redressive strategies for FTAs. A sub-branch of cross- or intercultural pragmatics is postcolonial pragmatics, which studies the use of language of the colonisers in a postcolonial society. In a postcolonial society, a second (as opposed to a foreign) language is sometimes used in interaction, as in the use of English in contemporary India.

Another recently emerged branch of pragmatics that has a close affinity with socio- and cross- or intercultural pragmatics is variational pragmatics. It aims to study and determine the influence or impact of macro-social factors such as region, social class, ethnicity, gender and age and the interplay of these factors on language use, especially pragmatic variation, in interaction. Construed thus, variational pragmatics also represents a research domain at the intersection of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, in particular dialectology.

The exploration of speech acts has been extended to inter-language pragmatics. Of these studies, some have investigated how a particular type of speech act is performed by non-native speakers in a given inter-language; others have compared and contrasted the similarities and differences in the realisation patterns of given speech acts between native and non-native speakers in a particular (inter)language.

Finally, mention should be made of conversation analysis (CA), sometimes also called conversational pragmatics. Since Levinson’s work in the early 1980s, CA has become a branch of macropragmatics. Grown out of a breakaway group of sociologists known as
ethnomethodologists within microsociology, CA represents an empirical, procedural and inductive approach to the analysis of (audio and/or video recordings of) naturally occurring, spontaneous conversations. It is concerned with the discovery and description of the methods and procedures that participants employ systematically to display their understanding of the structure of naturally occurring, spontaneous ‘talks in (face-to-face) interaction’. In conversation, there are rules governing sequential organisation such as the turn-taking system, the formulation of adjacency pairs and the mechanism for opening or closing a conversation. There are also norms regulating participation in a conversation such as those for how to hold the ‘floor’, how to interrupt and how to remain silent. Other interesting structural devices of conversation include the preference organisation, the pre-sequence system and the repair mechanism. Given that conversation is the most important spoken manifestation of language, CA has to be closely linked to prosodic pragmatics – a study of how prosody-like intonation can affect the interpretation of a variety of linguistic phenomena in relation to context. Furthermore, since rules, norms and regulations for conversational interaction may vary from culture to culture, society to society, and language to language, CA may overlap with the ethnography of speaking and cross-cultural pragmatics.

13.4.3 Group III

This group contains branches and research areas of macropragmatics that are not easily and/or neatly placed in the above two categories.

Historical pragmatics is a branch of macropragmatics that came to light in the 1990s. It is concerned with the investigation of language change between two given points in time in individual languages and in language generally from a pragmatic perspective. There are two main research trends that correspond roughly to the distinction between ‘external’ and ‘internal’ language change. The first, ‘external’ research strand is called pragmaphilology. Pragmaphilology represents primarily a ‘macro-approach’ to the study of the pragmatics of historical texts at a particular point of time. The focus is on the wider changing social and cognitive contexts of the texts in which pragmatic change occurs. The second, ‘internal’ research trend is diachronic pragmatics in its narrow sense. Diachronic pragmatics in this sense represents a ‘micro-approach’ to change in pragmatic phenomena over time, concentrating on the interface between a linguistic structure and its communicative use across different historical stages of the same language. Since the boundary between pragmaphilology and diachronic pragmatics is not clear-cut, an intermediate category, dubbed diachronic pragmaphilology, has also been proposed.

Next, historical sociopragmatics involves the interaction between historical pragmatics and sociopragmatics. According to some scholars, historical sociopragmatics is more closely related to the pragmaphilology research trend in historical pragmatics. It constitutes a systematic study of interaction between aspects of social context and particular historical language uses that engender pragmatic meaning. Historical sociopragmatics can be either synchronic or diachronic. Synchronic historical sociopragmatics studies how language use shapes and is shaped by social context at a certain moment of time in the past. By contrast, diachronic historical sociopragmatics traces how changes in language use shape social context, changes in social context shape language use and/or changes take place in the relationship between language use and social context.

The term ‘applied pragmatics’ has two senses. In its broadest sense, applied pragmatics makes reference to any application of the concepts and findings of theoretical pragmatics to practical tasks such as the diagnosis, assessment and treatment of pragmatic disorders,
human–computer interaction and the teaching and learning of a second and/or foreign language. In the last connection, the field is often called second and foreign language (L2) pragmatics. ‘Second and foreign language pragmatics’ is a term that is interchangeable with applied pragmatics in its narrowest sense. It is part of instructional pragmatics, namely, pragmatics that is concerned with how to teach and learn pragmatics in language, especially second and/or foreign language, instruction.

A corpus is a systematic collection of naturally occurring spoken or written language or a variety of such a language, which can be searchable online (see Chapter 32). When it is accessible on a computer, it is called computer corpus or corpora. By corpus pragmatics is meant the investigation of language use on the basis of the analysis of corpora. Corpus pragmatics forms part of empirical pragmatics. It can be divided into two types: (1) corpus-based; and (2) corpus-driven. In the former, researchers approach the corpora with a set of assumptions and expected findings. By comparison, the latter investigates linguistic forms and pragmatic functions that emerge from the corpora in order to discover things that have not been recognised. Much of the current research in corpus pragmatics is corpus-based rather than corpus-driven. From a methodological point of view, corpus pragmatics can be either form-based (that is, it takes a linguistic structure as its starting point and examines the range of pragmatic functions the form serves in a corpus) or function-based (that is, it takes a particular pragmatic function as a point of departure and studies how such a function is actually realised linguistically). Finally, corpus-based research in pragmatics can be either qualitative (treating corpora primarily as a source of natural data) or quantitative (studying patterns of frequency, distribution and collocation using statistical techniques).

Literary pragmatics can be best described as covering an area of research rather than a well-defined unified theory. It represents a domain at the intersection of pragmatics, literary theory and the philosophy of literature. It is the study of the use of linguistic forms in a literary text and the relationship between author, text and reader in a socio-cultural context from a pragmatic perspective, focusing on the question of what and how a literary text communicates. Two complementary aspects of literary pragmatics can be identified. On the one hand, how can the insights of pragmatic theories be employed for the study of literature, and on the other hand, how can the insights of literary pragmatics contribute to general pragmatic theories? Literary pragmatics can further be divided into two sub-branches: formalist and historical. Formalist literary pragmatics seeks to characterise literariness in terms of the pragmatic properties of literary texts, concentrating on formal analyses which are based on formal systems or pragmatic processes. In contrast with formalist literary pragmatics is historical literary pragmatics. Interdisciplinary in nature, historical literary pragmatics places an emphasis on the interconnections between literary studies, history studies, socio-cultural studies and pragmatic studies. Next, somewhat related to literary pragmatics is pragmatic stylistics or pragmastylistics. Pragmatic stylistics refers to the application of the findings and methodologies of theoretical pragmatics to the study of the concept of style in language, that is, systematic variations in usage in written or spoken language including those in literary texts among individual writers, genres and periods.

Originating in part from the work of Austin, legal pragmatics is concerned mainly with the study of legal documents and spoken legal discourse in the courtroom from a pragmatic point of view. Pragmatic features in written legal texts and spoken legal discourses that have been analysed include speech acts such as legal performatives, presuppositions, turn-taking, question–answer adjacency pairs and silence. The sociopragmatic concepts of power and politeness/impoliteness have also been used in these studies.
Finally, feminist pragmatics represents an approach to the study of gender and language in use, incorporating insights from both feminism and pragmatics. Within this approach, it is assumed that on the one hand, if pragmatics is to provide a theoretical framework for the investigation of gender and use of language, it has to be informed by the findings of feminist scholarship. On the other hand, pragmatics can inform feminist research on gender and use of language in a wide range of contexts.

13.5 Some future trends and directions

Having reviewed various branches in macropragmatics, let me finally point to a number of likely trends and directions for the future development of pragmatic research. Given the space at my disposal, I shall limit my discussion to two topics: (1) Anglo-American pragmatics; and (2) experimental pragmatics.

13.5.1 Anglo-American pragmatics

In Anglo-American pragmatics, the linguistic underdeterminacy thesis, mentioned in §13.2.3, has been widely accepted. For example, the three uses of the deictic/indexical *you* in (3) can be properly interpreted only if they are accompanied by physical behaviour of some sort (such as a selecting gesture or an eye contact), which requires an extralinguistic, physical context. Since the mid-1970s, context sensitivity caused by indexicality and other linguistic phenomena such as ambiguity, vagueness and ellipsis has been accounted for in terms of indexical semantics (cf. Bach’s concept of narrow context). But there is context sensitivity of a different kind. This type of context sensitivity is illustrated by sentences such as (4) and (8) above and (23) below.

(23) Susan has got absolutely nothing [appropriate] to wear [for this evening’s gala concert].

Though devoid of indexicality etc. the proposition expressed by each of the three sentences without the bracketed part still needs to be contextually enriched (that is, to the proposition with the bracketed constituent) so that an appropriate truth-value can be assigned to it. In recent years, context sensitivity of the second type has generated a heated debate among both philosophers of language and linguistic semanticists and pragmaticists. The focus of the debate is this: given that context does affect the truth-conditional content of a sentence uttered, should contextual effects be explained in semantic or pragmatic terms? The issues involved include (1) whether or not there is any UC, (2) whether or not there is pragmatic intrusion, namely, the pragmatically enriched content encroaches on the truth-conditional content of a sentence uttered, (3) how the semantic content of UCs is pragmatically recovered, (4) what is the pragmatical enrichment involved in the recovery of UCs or in the process of pragmatic intrusion: is it an explicature (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995), the pragmatic enrichment of what is said (e.g. Recanati 2010), implicature (e.g. Bach 2012) or conversational implicature (e.g. Levinson 2000; Huang 2014), and (5) what is the best way to carve out the respective territories of semantics and pragmatics. For these issues, contextualism, semantic minimalism, indexicalism, non-indexical contextualism, relevance theory and neo-Gricean pragmatics have all put forward different proposals and tests. Together with the classical Gricean distinction between what is said and what is implicated, these questions of context sensitivity and (covert) assignment of semantic content to a...
sentence uttered will continue to figure prominently in Anglo-American pragmatics well into the 2020s.

13.5.2 Experimental pragmatics

As already mentioned, experimental pragmatics in its narrowest sense was developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The research was largely concerned with the comprehension of conversational implicatures, especially generalized conversational implicatures (GCIs), with a rather narrow focus on scalar implicatures (SIs). There have been three competing views of GCIs in general and SIs in particular. One is that SIs convey default meaning sans a conscious inferential process irrespective of a particular context of use. This is called the default inference theory (e.g. Levinson 2000). Another, relevance-theoretic position is that they are essentially inferred contextually (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995). This is labelled the contextual inference theory. In addition, a third view holds that the derivation of SIs depends heavily on structural/grammatical factors. This is known as the structural inference theory (Chierchia 2013). All the three theoretical models have been subject to tests in experimental pragmatics. While much of the relevance-theoretically oriented experimental work favours the contextual inference approach, there is also evidence in support of the default inference theory and the structural inference model.

More recently, the scope of work in experimental pragmatics has been considerably widened. For instance the experimental testing of so-called ‘embedded (conversational) implicature’, a seemingly conversational implicature that is engendered locally at a sub-sentential level, typically occurring in a clause that is embedded under a logical operator such as a propositional attitude verb, a conditional and a comparative, as in (24), where the implicature trigger some is embedded under believe.

(24) Mr Gao believes that some of his parents’ friends were persecuted during Mao’s ‘Cultural Revolution’ in China.

Currently, there are two main approaches to embedded implicature: grammatical and pragmatic. Within the first, grammatical camp, there are two varieties: lexicalist and syntax-based/driven conventionalism. The central idea underlying both versions of conventionalism is that an embedded implicature is part of the lexico-grammatical content of a sentence. With regard to lexicalist conventionalism, an embedded implicature is hard-wired into the lexical entries of an implicature trigger. Next, according to the syntax-based conventionalism, the grammar of a language is equipped with a covert or hidden exhaustivity syntactic operator akin to ‘only’, which can be freely inserted into the tree diagram of a sentence. Going next to the pragmatic approach, one way is to defend the classic/neo-Gricean globalist account of conversational implicature. Another is a truth-conditional pragmatic analysis developed by Recanati. Under this approach, an embedded implicature is explained in terms of a primary pragmatic process of modulation, and free enrichment in particular. Whereas some experimental works confirm indirectly the Gricean globalist view, others do not (e.g. Huang 2014). My prediction is that, until the mid-2020s, experimental pragmatics will continue to be a burgeoning subfield of pragmatic research. Devising more refined experiments and generating more accurate results, it will continue to branch out, covering a much broader range of research topics and areas in pragmatics.
Notes

1 Part of the material contained in this chapter is drawn from Huang (2013).
2 Another reason for inclusion of pragmatics is that it can effect a radical simplification of semantics and syntax in an overall theory of linguistic ability (e.g. Huang 2014).
3 This debate can be traced back at least to the differences between philosophers in the tradition of ideal language philosophy such as Gottlob Frege, Alfred Tarski, Bertrand Russell, the early Ludwig Wittgenstein and Rudolf Carnap and philosophers in the camp of ordinary or natural language philosophy like J.L. Austin, H.P. Grice, Peter Strawson, the later Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Searle (e.g. Huang 2014).

Further reading

Allan and Jaszczolt (2012); Bublitz and Norrick (2011); Cummings (2010); Horn and Ward (2004); Huang (forthcoming); Noveck and Sperber (2004); Preyer and Peter (2005, 2007).

References