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Editorial: "Pragmatics: Quo Vadis?"

Abstract

The special issue on "Quo Vadis, Pragmatics?" is the result of a lively discussion among members of the editorial board of the *Journal of Pragmatics* triggered by the most recent revision of the journal's scope statement. The 11 contributions that make up this special issue cover a rich suite of themes, from the identity of the field to issues of multimodality, interdisciplinarity and ethics, taking in non-propositional, Gricean, historical, and discursive perspectives along the way. We are grateful to the contributors to this special issue who responded to our call and hope the result will stimulate further discussion about the present and the future of the field.

1. Introduction

In 2017, the *Journal of Pragmatics* celebrated its 40th anniversary, making it the oldest journal in pragmatics and one of the oldest in linguistics as a field.¹ Our current Editorial Board is more than 50-strong and our Honorary Board includes 17 members in addition to the journal's two founding editors, Hartmut Haberland and Jacob Mey. Anytime that a journal as old as this and with an editorial board as large as this decides to revise its scope statement, some discussion is likely to be generated; and that is precisely what happened when we decided to revise our scope statement in late 2017.

While in the end the changes brought about were modest – the revised scope statement emphasises two key points: that prospective articles must be based on attested data, and that they must make a theoretically interesting contribution – the amount of discussion generated convinced us that it was time to take stock. Subsequently, we invited several members of our Editorial Board representing as many different voices in contemporary pragmatics as possible, to contribute to a special issue to be titled "Quo Vadis, Pragmatics?".² In the invitation email, the rationale for this special issue was explained as follows:

"As pragmatics has been growing in new directions, both theoretically and methodologically, we believe the time is ripe for a public discussion that will help us trace both converging as well as diverging lines in the ways we conceive of what pragmatics is and how it should be practiced. Our hope is that the outcome will do justice to the polyphony of

¹ The oldest continuously running journal in linguistics is *Transaction of the Philological Society*, first published in 1854, followed by the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* (1886), *The Modern Language Journal* (1916), and *Language* (1925). Other long-running linguistics journals include *Word* (1943), *Language Learning* (1948), *Lingua* (1949), *Journal of Linguistics* (1965), *TESOL Quarterly* (1967), *Linguistic Inquiry* (1970), *Language in Society* (1970) and *System* (1973). This list is by no means exhaustive.

² In our attempts to locate previous 'taking stock' articles in the journal, we came across Stamenov (2003), which is a review article of Mey's *Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics* (1998, ed.). Stamenov's single-authored article covers some of the same ground as the current special issue and offers a useful comparison to how thinking about the field has evolved in the past fifteen years or so.

views within our field and will help identify both challenges to a unified view of the field as well as promising directions for future research.”

The 11 contributions contained in this special issue attempt to do precisely this.

2. Overview of the special issue

The opening article, by Jonathan Culpeper and Matthew Gillings, “Pragmatics: Data trends”, takes stock of the last twenty years of pragmatics research published in the *Journal of Pragmatics*, as a way of making predictions about the future direction of the field. Based on a sample of 200 papers published between 1999 and 2018, the authors identify some general trends which they expect will continue into the near future. Notable among these is the field’s increasing use of more data, richer data (in the sense of both larger discourses, and greater attention to context), and multimodal data. Data from languages other than English are on the rise, while constructed examples are more or less a thing of the past. Based on this case study, pragmatics at the start of the 21st century has the outlook of a thoroughly empirically engaged field concerned with all kinds of language-in-use. From this vantage point, the following ten articles offer a number of different vistas on contemporary pragmatics.

The growing emphasis on naturally-occurring data in pragmatics has also influenced the way in which we theorise it. Kasia Jaszczolt’s article, “Rethinking being Gricean: New challenges for metapragmatics”, invites us to consider the various ways in which the original Gricean program in philosophical pragmatics has been challenged over the past forty years. Her meta-theoretical inquiry draws attention to empirical work in pragmatics that has seemingly questioned Grice’s stance on key theoretical tools, ranging from intentions and inferences through to propositions and grammar. She argues that these challenges do not fundamentally threaten the Gricean program, but either offer ways in which it can be extended theoretically or, alternatively, are in pursuit of different, often complementary goals.

The impact of Gricean thinking on historical pragmatics is also among the themes of Elizabeth Traugott’s contribution “Whither historical pragmatics? A cognitively-oriented perspective”. Further covering advances in quantitative linguistics, psycholinguistics, and experimental pragmatics as they relate to historical pragmatics, this fascinating journey ends with a bold challenge to the Uniformitarian principle, that is, roughly, the idea that, when it comes to processes of meaning-making, the people of today are the same as the people of the past. The author thus opens the door to entirely new ways of conceptualizing language change, true to her focus throughout the article – and in much of her own work – on cognitively oriented approaches to meaning change in discursive contexts.

While the impact of Gricean pragmatics is a recurring theme among the papers in this special issue, many of them raise the need to also go beyond this paradigm. In “Pragmatics and the notion of non-propositional effects”, Deirdre Wilson and Robyn Carston consider modes of mental representation other than propositions, which may still be triggered linguistically. Using the example of novel metaphor, they find that mental imagery and affective states are two such types of effects; however, as these are not activated through

standard inferential comprehension processes, accounting for them requires going beyond Grice's notion of speaker's meaning.

Going beyond this Gricean comfort-zone, however, raises questions regarding the field's unity and identity. Ad Foolen's "Quo vadis Pragmatics? From adaptation to participatory sense-making" is an ambitious attempt at identifying precisely what (if anything) is unique to pragmatics such that it could provide a unifying essence from which the field can project itself into the future. Following an overview of the past forty years of research that runs parallel to the author's own career in the field, Foolen identifies two potential threats to the identity of pragmatics: its own internal fragmentation, and the "closing in" of neighbouring disciplines, especially cognitive linguistics and cognitive science. He concludes that pragmatics can still stand its ground if it adopts the notion of participatory sense-making as a unifying "core" for pragmatic endeavors of all kinds.

Participatory sense-making, according to Foolen, is about "the dynamic, online character of interaction" where interaction combines the two perspectives, of the speaker and of the hearer. This thematic emphasis on interaction as central to pragmatics is developed in distinct ways in the next two papers. In "Contemporary issues in conversation analysis: Embodiment and materiality, multimodality and multisensoriality in social interaction", Lorenza Mondada pushes us to not only embrace the inevitably embodied and multimodal nature of interaction amongst co-present participants in our analyses of language use, but to examine the way in which objects are not merely "mobilised" but also "sensed" in interaction. She argues that contemporary conversation analysis has moved beyond its initial primary focus on language and action to increasingly considering the inevitable links between action, language, body and materiality that are immanent to interaction.

Taking this a step further, in "Communicative interaction in terms of *ba* theory: Towards an innovative approach to language practice" William Hanks, Sachiko Ide, Yasuhiro Katagiri, Scott Saft, Yoko Fujii and Kishiko Ueno propose a radical departure from entrenched ways of thinking about individuals (and their perspectives) as primary. Adopting the Japanese philosophical concept of *ba* and *basho*, the authors emphasise instead the continuous and ever-changing nature of reality and thereby of how it is experienced by people. They go on to outline the levels of 'primary *ba*', 'secondary *ba*' and *ba* theory, which they illustrate with examples of spontaneous conversation from Japanese and English. Hanks, Ide, Katagiri, Saft, Fujii and Ueno's article places itself in the framework of Emancipatory Pragmatics, which explicitly seeks to provide theoretical models that are complementary to the currently dominant ones inspired by Western philosophy of language.

The challenge to Western modes of theorizing and practicing pragmatics is taken up next by Felix Ameka and Marina Terkourafi in their paper "What if....? Imagining non-Western perspectives on pragmatic theory and practice". The authors outline two main ways in which so-called 'non-Western' perspectives have been marginalised in pragmatics: the first is by not having inspired new theoretical concepts (this is precisely the gap that Emancipatory Pragmatics seeks to fill), and the second is by mainly serving as the test-bed for the 'universality' of theoretical concepts inspired by Western modes of thinking. Arguing that the latter are, nevertheless, not culturally neutral but rather themselves situated in Western ways of interacting with the world, the authors go on to advocate a plurality of

knowledge systems as a more inclusive way forward in pragmatic theory and practice, including the practice of research ethics.

The importance of ethics is a theme expanded upon in the next article by Miriam Locher and Brook Bolander, titled “Ethics in pragmatics”. As ethics requirements clearly vary across national and institutional contexts, they argue that ethics should not be seen as merely a set of rules or restrictions, but is more productively conceptualised in pragmatics as a decision-making process that continues throughout the research lifecycle. They refer to key resources that can be drawn upon in this decision-making process, and illustrate some of the challenges faced by pragmatics scholars in ensuring that our research reflects important ethical principles. In so doing, they offer a way forward in proposing that research papers published in the *Journal of Pragmatics* which involve the use of data collected by the researcher should include brief discussions of the ethical measures that underpin their work. In this way, more dialogue will be engendered amongst scholars in pragmatics – dialogue that is essential if we are to productively engage with perspectives on research ethics around the world.

The final two articles in this special issue seek to challenge pragmatics researchers to seek out new perspectives by deepening their engagement with neighbouring disciplines. In “Im/politeness and discursive pragmatics”, Pilar Blitvich and Maria Sifianou explore how pragmatics might more productively draw on insights from discourse analysis to better understand (im)politeness, which has emerged as one of the central topics in pragmatics over the past thirty years. They suggest that while pragmatics involves not only the analysis of utterances but discourse as well, researchers have tended to either employ micro- or macro-level methods, while the meso-level has remained relatively unexplored. They consider two meso-level notions that have been employed in (im)politeness research, activity types and communities of practice, and contrast these with what the analysis of genres can bring to our understanding of (im)politeness. They argue that the study of (im)politeness needs to be grounded in these three levels of sociological inquiry in order for its interdisciplinary promise to be realised.

The interdisciplinary theme is extended in a practical direction by Christian Burgers, Britta Brugman and Amber Boeynaems in their contribution “Systematic literature reviews: Four applications for interdisciplinary research”. Here the authors argue that pragmatics has much to offer to increasingly large-scale multidisciplinary research efforts. While the term Applied Pragmatics is sometimes used with reference to the teaching of pragmatics in second language contexts, pragmatics is in fact applied to all sorts of research domains ranging from health and education through to advertising and politics. Key topics studied in pragmatics are also of great relevance to other fields, including communication and psychology. However, while some degree of cross-fertilisation occurs, it is more limited than it perhaps could be. Burgers, Brugman and Boeynaems propose that a productive way forward in bridging these cross-disciplinary gaps is to undertake and publish systematic literature reviews. Such reviews may map different approaches to the same topic across disciplines, bring together different perspectives, contrast methods used in different disciplines to answer the same research questions, or lead to quantitative meta-analyses. The potential pay-off is considerable, as through such reviews pragmatics can better

position itself to not only contribute to other disciplines, but to play a central role in research that attempts to address some of the world's most pressing social challenges.

All in all, the contributions to this special issue represent a multiplicity of views and a variety of perspectives on key themes relating both to how pragmatics is theorised and practiced in the early 21st century. Showcasing this diversity has been precisely our goal with this special issue. In view of the outcome, we feel we do not need to look into our crystal ball to assert that the lively debates going on in the field are likely to keep us busy for many years to come.

Reference

Stamenov, Maxim. 2003. Quo Vadis, pragmatics? Alternative conceptions in making sense of a heterogeneous discipline. *Journal of Pragmatics* 35 (2): 263-297.