Different Views on Pragmatics Workshop at the Institute of Design and Communication

University of Southern Denmark, Kolding

August 26, 2014
Universitetsparken 1, Lokale K-60.01

Abstracts

Pragmatics and Pragmatism — Philosophical Roots
Nina Bonderup Dohn, Kolding/Denmark

Pragmatics and pragmatism have their philosophical roots in the writings of Peirce, James, Dewey and C. I. Lewis. In this opening talk I shall present an overview of these roots with a focus on the philosophers' epistemological and ontological claims concerning the relationship between practical activity, experience, inquiry, truth, and reality. Divergences exist between the philosophers on these issues, but common to them all is a tight coupling of 'practical activity' and theoretical beliefs; an emphasis on scientific inquiry as an activity; a critique of radical skepticism; a fallibilism concerning theory and method; an inferential account of experience; and a non-representational account of propositional content. These concepts and their relation to one another will all be elaborated upon in the talk. In addition, I shall point at some of the differences between the views of the 'founding fathers'. Peirce and James thus for instance had a more narrow conception of pragmatism than Dewey did: They saw the term as referring strictly to the 'pragmatist maxim' (called Peirce's principle) that a hypothesis or metaphysical dispute should be clarified by identifying its 'practical consequences'. If no such practical consequences could be identified, the hypothesis was empty and the dispute eliminable. Dewey for his part developed a wider sense of pragmatism which focused on inquiry as initiated by a practically experienced problem in an indeterminate situation.

References

Charles Sanders Peirce (1958): "How to make our ideas clear". In: Charles S. Peirce: *Selected Writings*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications. 113–136.

John Dewey (1960): *The Quest for Certainty*. New York: Capricorn Books.

William James (1975): *Pragmatism: A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking*. Cambridge MA: Harvard Unviesity Press.

Clarence Irving Lewis (1923). "A pragmatic conception of the *a priori*". *Journal of Philosophy* 20. 169–77.

Inferential Pragmatics
Eckard Rolf, Münster i. Westf./Germany

Inferential pragmatics can be traced back to the William James lectures delivered by Paul Grice in 1967 (cf. Grice 1989, 1–143). Inferential pragmatics takes as its central target the elucidation of speaker meaning. 'What is meant', the meaning, the speaker tries to convey, emerges in relation to 'what is said' by him. In the case of literal meaning or 'literalness' there is a convergence between 'what is meant' and 'what is said', but there are other cases, cases where what is said and what is meant diverge. Literalness is given simply when (direct) speech acts have been performed. Apart from literalness, the default case of speaker meaning, there are three kinds of such a divergence: (i) indirectness, (ii) inexplicitness, and (iii) non-literalness.

Indirectness is given when conversational implic-**a**-tures have been realized or indirect speech acts have been performed. Inexplicitness is given in cases of conversational implic-**i**-tures (Bach) or explicatures (Sperber/Wilson, Carston, Recanati), i. e., in contexts in which the sense of what is said has to be understood in a 'completed' ('saturated') or 'expanded' ('freely enriched') way. Finally, cases of non-literal meaning or non-literalness are given when speakers make use of tropes: when they make use of metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles *etc.* Non-literalness always involves a special kind of sense modulation.

As a linguistic discipline, inferential pragmatics should be distinguished from the theory of discursive commitments advocated by Robert B. Brandom (1994). Brandom takes commitments and entitlements as the main features of assertions, pragmatics in his view characteristically has to deal with; inferences, however, are regarded in this view as the business of semantics. Brandom's program at the same time runs toward a normative pragmatics and toward an inferential semantics.

In contrast to this, the kind of inferences Grice and his followers are interested in does not belong to the realm semantics is concerned with, it essentially and distinctively is a matter of pragmatics. As something that is suggested by the speaker such inferences are non-logical (non-demonstrative) in their very nature, and as such they are the proper subject of inferential pragmatics.

The talk is intended to give evidence and arguments.

References

Robert B. Brandom (1994): *Making It Explicit.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Herbert Paul Grice (1989): *Studies in the Ways of Words.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Eckard Rolf (2013): *Inferentielle Pragmatik. Zur Theorie der Sprecher-Bedeutung.* Berlin: Erich Schmidt.

The Game-Theoretic Approach to Pragmatics: The Case of Optimal Answering Strategies
Anton Benz, Berlin/Germany

It is notoriously difficult to say what exactly the subject matter of pragmatics is. There is, however, a general agreement that the way how contextual requirements and the goals of interlocutors shape their strategies of language use and interpretation is one of its core topics. Game theory provides a rigorous and formally precise framework for modelling strategic behaviour in general, and game theoretic pragmatics is an attempt to bring this rigour to linguistic pragmatics in particular. It approaches pragmatic phenomena by first setting up general models which capture the essential features of the context of conversation, and then by deducing from these models appropriate strategies of language generation and interpretation, which finally describe the observed behaviour. The most important applications so far have been the theory of conversational implicatures and models of language change and linguistic typology (see e.g. Benz et al 2006, 2011). In this talk, I address a relatively recent application, namely the generation of answers in computational recommender systems, and show how game theoretical models can be used for designing optimal answering strategies. For example, a recurrent problem arises from user requests which cannot be satisfied directly. For example, a user of a real estate recommender system may ask whether the house under discussion has a garden. The system can answer simply 'no' if it does not have one. However, it may be better to provide additional information as in (1b), which conveys the 'no' answer indirectly.

(1) User: *Does the house have a garden?*
    (a) System: *No.*
    (b) System: *It has a balcony.*
    (c) System: *It has a large basement.*

A particular problem is to explain why answer (1c) is ruled out. This makes it necessary to consider the handling of rare user types. The talk is partly based on collaborative work with members of the PragSales project (cf. http://www.zas.gwz-berlin.de/index.php?id=1711&L=1).

References

Anton Benz, Christian Ebert, Gerhard Jäger & Robert van Rooij (eds.) (2011): *Language, Games, and Evolution. Trends in Current Research on Language and Game Theory.* Heidelberg: Springer. [Lecture Notes in Artificial Intelligence. 6207]

Benz, Anton, Gerhard Jäger & Robert van Rooij (2006): *Game Theory and Pragmatics.* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan. [Palgrave Studies in Pragmatics, Language and Cognition]

A Pragmatic View on Pragmatics
Jakob Steensig, Aarhus/Denmark

My method is conversation analysis (CA). I analyze instances of talk-in-interaction, trying to understand how language (and other communicative means) is used, and the logic that interactants base their social actions on. This means that I have a very pragmatic, or practical, view on what pragmatics is about. On the one hand, everything we do in CA is pragmatics because social actions are our point of departure. On the other hand, we operate with distinctions between, for instance, "pragmatic", "prosodic", "grammatic", *etc.* turn construction methods (Steensig 2011). A field that has received increasing interest within CA during the past years is "action formation" (Levinson 2013), which is basically the old speech act problem of "how to do things with words" (Austin 1962), but now treated on a more practical, and less language philosophical, basis.

In my presentation, I will look at how "pragmatics" is used as a name for a "level" in language (within a paradigm that basically does not believe in "levels") and at the area of action formation (in a paradigm that rejects the speech act theory as being too far from the actual practices of talk-in-interaction).

References

John L. Austin (1962): *How To Do Things with Words.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stephen C. Levinson (2013): "Action formation and ascription". In Jack Sidnell & Tanya Stivers (Eds.): *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis.* Oxford: Blackwell. 103–130.

Jakob Steensig (2011): "Turn-taking in conversation". In Gisle Andersen & Karin Aijmer (Eds.): *Pragmatics of Society.* Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 499–532.

A "Latourian Perspective" on Pragmatics
Jeanette Landgrebe, Kolding/Denmark

Taking the point of departure in the French sociologist Bruno Latour's studies on how scientific work and technological products become established facts in the social world, my aim is to demonstrate why I consider Latour and his Actor-Network Theory to represent the ultimate pragmatic world view. To do this, I will compare with the research methodology of Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks, 1992).

The field of pragmatics studies the ways context contributes to meaning. Seen from a Latourian perspective the notion of context can be interpreted as an Actor-Network (ANT), which comprises both human and non-human actors (or actants) (Latour, 1987). In this ANT-network not only humans but also objects and the environment surrounding us can be seen as agents creating meaning. If we take this to be a universal truth, we

are in danger of opening Pandora's Box, which critics of Latour's Actor-Network Theory have indeed discussed. However, in its most broad definition or interpretation, could it be that the notion of pragmatics cannot be defined by language behavior *per se* (i. e., from a micro-perspective), but that that every single context and how this particular context contributes to meaning can only be understood as it unfolds over time and space in a complex exchange between human and non-human actors to form so-called actor-networks (i. e., from a macro-perspective), which are not static but dynamic?

In his book *Science in Action* Latour takes us through the process from idea to established artifact, and demonstrates how social interaction is analysed empirically as a series of unbroken chains of social practices, which constantly produce local phenomena but also global phenomena. Through this, Latour demonstrates how micro-sociologies are integrated with macro-sociologies. Micro-interactions such as those investigated in the field of CA — through time and space — create global macro-effects, e. g., in the form of so-called black boxes (which can be interpreted as materialized meaning) and macro-actors, which are spokes persons for a long series of micro-actors. These macro-effects, however, are not static or unbreakable, as they can be changed if changes in the ANT-network occur, and this is why I consider Latour and his ANT theory to represent the ultimate pragmatic worldview.

References

Harvey Sacks (1992): *Lectures on Conversation, Volumes I and II.* Edited by Gail Jefferson with an introduction by Emanuel A. Schegloff. Blackwell, Oxford.

Harold Garfinkel (1967): *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bruno Latour, (1987). *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society.* Milton Keynes: Open University Press.