

INTRODUCTION

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The term "pragmatics" was, in its present meaning, introduced by Charles Morris and Rudolf Carnap, designating studies related to, but distinguished from semantics and syntax. According to them syntax analysed relations between signs, semantics relations between signs and the objects to which they can be applied and pragmatics the relations between signs and the sign users. Carnap (1942) says explicitly "if, in an investigation, explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put it more generally, to the user of the language, then we assign it to the study of pragmatics"¹.

Morris and Carnap introduced these distinctions to separate types of studies they did not wish to engage in, concentrating (especially Carnap) on syntax and semantics. Still they did not doubt the importance of the newly coined discipline and in the second edition of "Meaning and Necessity" an appendix appears where Carnap tries to give strongly behavioristical definitions of key terms in pragmatics.

It is only much later however, in the formal work of Montague, Lewis and Cresswell that pragmatics becomes a science with a firm structure. Its definition also changes: "Pragmatics is the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed" (Stalnaker 1972)². This time the hitherto absent ideas of act, context and performance become paramount.

This formal discipline, an outgrowth of Kripkean possible world semantics, is not the whole of present day pragmatics however. To the contrary followers of the second Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle and Grice develop a precise but non formal theory of speech acts; they do not call it "pragmatics" but it is evidently concerned,

using other methods and languages, with the problems interesting their more formalistic colleagues. Some attempts have been made to unify the two trends. But the future is still open³.

Is pragmatics concerned with natural languages or with formal languages? Obviously with both: natural and formal languages are used (and, pace Wittgenstein, for Montague it is not evident that they are different in kind). Is pragmatics an empirical or a formal discipline? Obviously both (observations about the use of languages and formalisms can help and be assisted by deductions of the analytical consequences of the fact that an agent is using a speech act).

Regrettably however, the four main parts of pragmatics:

- the formal study of the pragmatics of natural languages
- the empirical study of the pragmatics of natural languages
- the formal study of the pragmatics of formal languages
- the empirical study of the pragmatics of natural languages

have not been fully developed, and their interrelations have not been made clear. For instance, to what extent are psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics (disciplines absent from the scene that saw Carnap and Morris introduce their concept) parts of the empirical pragmatics of natural languages? Is the sociology of scientific languages part of the empirical pragmatics of quasi-formal languages or not? We are not able to answer clearly these questions at the present moment.

A more fundamental remark has to be made: if the central concept of pragmatics is the concept of "language user", we suggest that there is something (called: language) that is used by an agent (its user). What type of existence is proper to this entity called "language"? Is it by any chance the abstract capacity to create an infinite number of grammatical sentences, called by Chomsky "competence", or is it the concrete and finite set of skills enabling members of a language community to perform communicative acts in circumstances of a given type? If the central concept of pragmatics is the concept of "context", have we to envisage a strict separation between "context" and "statement" or are both so deeply intertwined that only conceptual frontiers can be introduced?

Even if we do feel closer to the second view than to the first, further research is urgently needed. Is a user not always an agent and is action theory not presupposed by, but until now, absent from pragmatics?⁴ The first reason why philosophers should at present study pragmatics is that a need for clarification exists. We do not

know what this discipline (or pseudo discipline) might be, and we want to overcome the apparent precision of this unfamiliar term.

Even our present state of confusion allows us to acknowledge, however, that quite a few classical philosophical problems will in the future have to be studied within the field of pragmatics. A few examples will be sufficient.

1) Descartes' "Cogito ergo sum" belongs to pragmatics. One can indeed translate his statement as follows "When I assert that I doubt my existence, I must exist because I perform the speech act of asserting something". Even if the connexion expressed by this translation is grasped by intuition and not by deduction, it still is the connexion between a statement and the agent producing this statement. Its place is within pragmatics.

2) Kant's transcendental deduction of the categories, trying to infer from the fact that every thought "that p" must in principle be able to be accompanied by an "I think that p", tries to infer from a relation between the language user and the language some properties of the objects the language speaks about.

3) Philosophy of science recognizes more and more that the concepts of "holding a theory", "considering a statement as a law", "using an argument as the explanation of a fact" are pragmatical relationships. Stegmuller's recent books, inspired by the work of Sneed, Balzer and Moulines bear witness to these facts.

4) Husserl's phenomenology is the study of pragmatical relations between the subject of thought, perception and imagination and the objects thought, imagined, perceived. If phenomenology is to be made precise (as Dagfinn Føllesdal tries to encourage) and is to be revived (from its existential sleep), pragmatics will have to be used as the tool to do so.

However, such "great expectations" stand in sad contrast to the unhappy but fertile chaos characterising our discipline at the present moment. For these reasons the editors of these two volumes on "Pragmatics and Philosophy" have attempted to show part of the promise and to dissipate some confusions.

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