

[Special Lecture]

Pragmatics as a Component vs. Pragmatics as a Perspective of Linguistics¹

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The discussion of pragmatics as a component or a perspective of linguistics was started in the 1970'es in Haberland and Mey (1977). I am not going to claim that "Continental Pragmatics" (as Stephen Levinson called the perspective school in 1982) has the correct approach and that some other (should we call it "Insular Pragmatics"?) is wrong. My claim is that they complement each other and that both are needed in their own way. I give examples of how the "pragmatic question *par excellence*", viz. "How did this utterance come to be produced?" (Haberland and Mey 1977: 8) can be reformulated in order to highlight current issues in pragmatic investigations and to help us formulate some (new) questions, not all of which have an easy answer.

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1. Introduction

I want to take my point of departure in a recent polemic between Kanavillil Rajagopalan on the one hand and Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber on the other, which appeared in the journal *Intercultural Pragmatics* in 2005. Wilson and Sperber comment on the present situation of tough competition for academic resources—like academic positions, research grants and journal pages. The recent increased emphasis on journal impact factors and the individual scholar's track record of being quoted (preferably in the right journals) has made this competition even tougher. In this situation, one might be tempted "to claim that what you are not interested in is simply not interesting, that the kind of research you do should be the top priority, that other approaches are scientifically flawed, and that you are the future while others are burdens from the past." (Wilson and Sperber 2005: 101) Although it will become obvious that I find myself

¹ I would like to thank the organizers of the 12th Annual Meeting of the Pragmatics Society of Japan in December 2009 for inviting me to give the lecture on which this paper is based, and for their hospitality during the conference. The lively discussion after the lecture has left its traces in this paper and I only refrain from acknowledging any particular contribution to it lest I forgot to mention somebody. After the conference, I had the opportunity to discuss a number of points touched upon in this paper with Jacob Mey and Janus Mortensen.

among those who consider pragmatics as a way of doing linguistics rather than a sub-discipline of linguistics, it is not my aim to set up two camps in linguistic pragmatics by claiming that “the other side” is doing the wrong thing, or that those who have a different position are not doing pragmatics at all or doing it the wrong way. What I do claim is that different concepts of what pragmatics is can lead to different research questions, and hence to different answers to the questions asked.

As Wilson and Sperber (2005: 101) rightly point out, the “perspective” camp is not a beleaguered and threatened minority “struggling to find a voice”, and they maintain that “advocates of the social approach have run most of the pragmatics institutions and journals right from the start” (2005: 101), referring to Jacob Mey as one of the founders and for many years Chief Editor of the *Journal of Pragmatics* and Jef Verschueren as the founder of the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA). As of September 2010, Jacob Mey has been terminated as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, and he has started a new journal *Pragmatics and Society* (Mey, Haberland and Fischer 2010), while Jef Verschueren continues to be Secretary General of IPrA. But neither are the followers of the sub-discipline approach a beleaguered minority without access to publication channels and international conferences. The two schools happily coexist, which does not mean that they always agree about everything.

2. Discipline vs. perspective

A discussion of whether Pragmatics should be considered a sub-discipline of linguistics or rather a perspective of linguistics started in the 1970s, continued through the 90s and flares up only occasionally today. Basically the discussion is an exercise in *metapragmatics*, defined by Claudia Caffi as “the theoretical debate on pragmatics and its central concerns, its epistemological foundations, and the definition of its relevant object and scope.” (Caffi 1998: 581) In a debate of this kind, it is not particularly interesting to decide who is or has been right, but rather to see where and why people differ.

If one looks at one of the standard textbooks of pragmatics, such as George Yule’s *Pragmatics*, one could read the chapter headings as a listing of sub-disciplines of the discipline of pragmatics, which together comprise the discipline of pragmatics as a sub-discipline of linguistics:

“Deixis and distance, Reference and inference, Presupposition and entailment, Cooperation and implicature, Speech acts and events, Politeness and interaction, Conversation and preference structure, Discourse and culture” (Yule 1996, chapter headings)

However, most of these fields are not only sub-disciplines of linguistics, but are also dealt with within philosophy, logic, sociology, cultural studies, ethnography and even psychology. So if pragmatics, according to Yule, is a subdiscipline of *something*, this *something* is not necessarily linguistics.

Two of the scholars that have had the greatest influence on pragmatics are John Searle and Harvey Sacks. Neither of them would ever have considered himself a linguist, and quite emphatically so. This has to do with the fact that throughout the 20th century, language studies were a field too broad to be left to the linguists. The Danish structuralist Louis Hjelmslev even asked for language to be given back to linguistics, since linguistics was the only field that studied language *as language* and not in relationship to something else. Therefore, the broad characterization of pragmatics implicit in Yule's textbook already places pragmatics in an interdisciplinary framework and therefore, at least partly, outside linguistics. And a field cannot be a subfield of something that actually is narrower than itself.

Likewise, the characterization of pragmatics by Verschueren, Östman, Blommaert and Bulcaen in the 1995 *Handbook of Pragmatics*, where pragmatics is defined as “the cognitive, social, and cultural study of language and communication” (Verschueren et al., 1995: ix), goes beyond a mere listing of sub-disciplines, which is fully in line with Verschueren being the first who talked about the “pragmatic perspective” in the late 1980s. Verschueren and his co-authors explicitly do not talk about “the study of cognitive, social and cultural aspects of language and communication”, but about the study of language and communication from a cognitive, social and cultural point of view. Thus they do not single out certain aspects of language and communication which are studied by pragmatics. Rather, they formulate the all-embracing (or “catholic”) position that pragmatics is the study of *all of* language and communication, taking its point of departure in cognition, society and culture.

But if pragmatics is not just an assembly of loosely connected study areas having to do with language *and something else outside it*, there must be a unifying question for all pragmatics. One of the first attempts to formulate this question was made in the Editorial of the first issue of the *Journal of Pragmatics* in 1977, where the authors (Jacob Mey and myself) write, “Linguistic pragmatics [...] characterize[s] a new way of looking at things linguistic, rather than marking off clean borderlines to other disciplines.” (Haberland and Mey 1977: 5)

In the 1977 Editorial we went on to say that “the pragmatic question *par excellence* is therefore not: What does an utterance mean? but: How did this utterance come to be produced?” (Haberland and Mey, 1977: 8) In 2002, we expanded on this by writing that “we tried to redirect the analytic view away from finding traces of life in a petrified (but for that reason durable and analyzable) product—the ‘text’ in the sense of Haberland (1999)—to a concern with the ‘live’ conditions under which the utterance had been produced. But this implied also that we at least had to open our eyes to the possibility that pragmatics was not so much a sub-discipline of linguistics (and a relatively new one at that time), but rather a fundamentally different way of looking at things linguistic. Or, in Mey's words (2001: 8–10), that pragmatics was not so much a component as a perspective of linguistics.” (Haberland and Mey 2002: 1672)

At first glance, one might wonder why the rather terse formula of “How did this

utterance come to be produced?” should characterize the perspective model of pragmatics. But this formulation of the pragmatic question *par excellence* put itself firmly within a tradition that justifies pragmatics as a discipline that goes beyond the discipline of semantics by *also* being study of meaning. Not of meaning of isolated sentence types abstracted from the context in which they can be and have been used, but the study of what concrete and actually produced sentence tokens in use mean to those who produce and understand them. (I understand Jacob Mey’s later extension of linguistic pragmatics to the study of pragmatic acts, which are not necessarily speech acts (Mey 2001), as a radicalization of the original approach, born of the realization that meaning is not restricted to what we do with words, but is embodied in everything we do, with words or otherwise.)

In this way, the characterization of pragmatics in Haberland and Mey 1977 does not carve out an object from language to be studied by the discipline of pragmatics. Rather, it looks at all communication, but does this by asking a new question. Pragmatics has always the speaker (and hearer) in mind, and will always look at language not as an object but something that is done and done in context. Semantics carves out a chunk of language and studies it: for some views, this chunk is about what words mean and how they combine to meanings of larger constructions like sentences. Pragmatics does not merely carve a different bit out of the whole of language and study it (like how the context of uttering is relevant to the truth-value of a sentence type). Pragmatics asks a new question, by looking at *all* of the communication situation, its participants and its elements. The question is: how come that this utterance (and not any other) fits the particular communicative needs of the participants in a situation?

The original reason that we talked about linguistic pragmatics in the 1970s was that there was a strong awareness that traditionally the term pragmatics did not belong to linguistics but to semiotic, logic and philosophy. One of the first to point out that there is more to meaning than what is dealt with by semantics was Charles Morris, who himself was not a linguist. For Morris, pragmatics studies “the relation of signs to interpreters” (Morris 1938: 82). Along similar lines, Rudolf Carnap states that “if in an investigation reference is made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics.” (Carnap 1942: 9) For Morris and Carnap, pragmatics is not a sub-discipline of linguistics but the third sub-discipline of semiotic, after syntax (the study of the relationship between signs) and semantics (the study of the relationship between signs and objects). In these early attempts at defining pragmatics by distinguishing it from semantics, semantics is seen as a study of language that can proceed without taking into account that sentences are uttered and interpreted by speakers. But taking speaker and listener, or, in more general terms, the user of language into account, also means that we have to look at the context in which sentences are uttered, as in this (much later) definition by George Yule: “Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a listener (or reader) Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning.” (Yule 1996: 3)

But from here it is not too far to a definition that describes pragmatics as a linguistic discipline with clear borderlines: “The most promising are the definitions that equate pragmatics with ‘meaning minus semantics’, or with a theory of language understanding that takes context into account, in order to complement the contribution that semantics makes to meaning.” (Levinson 1983: 32) For Levinson, this approach is clearly distinct and preferable to that what later became known as the perspective school, which he called “Continental Pragmatics” (1983: 6). In the early 80’s, he saw “Continental Pragmatics” represented in the publications of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, in contrast to work by himself, Gerald Gazdar, and many others. The advantage of Levinson’s definition is that it makes it relatively easy to distinguish between problems that belong within pragmatics and those which do not.

This advantage is also obvious in Gazdar’s often-quoted definition of pragmatics as the “study of meaning minus truth conditions” (1979: 2). The argument runs roughly like this:²

The meaning of ‘and’ is normally truth-conditional:

p	T
q	T
p ^ q	T

But in some cases this doesn’t work:

- (1) She took arsenic.
- (2) She fell ill.

Both (1) and (2) may be true in some possible world, but both (3) and (4) are usually not true in the same possible world (at least not at the same time),

- (3) She took arsenic and fell ill.
- (4) She fell ill and took arsenic.

Here the meaning of ‘and’ is not truth-conditional:

p	T
q	T
p ^ q	contingent

According to Gazdar, we have a problem to be dealt with by pragmatics, since it belongs to meaning but is not governed by *truth-conditions*. One possible way to ana-

² The argument is spelled out in Gazdar (1979: 69–83) using different examples from the one chosen here.

lyze sentences like (3) and (4) is by referring to Grice's *maxim of order*. Hence, pragmatics 'cleans up' what unruly parts of meaning cannot be dealt with by truth conditions.

I would like to mention in passing that there was another strong, formal tradition in pragmatics within logic, originating from Bar-Hillel. Bar-Hillel proposed that "pragmatics be concerned with indexical expressions, whose meanings can only be determined relative to user and context of use." (Morgan 1977: 57) This is not very far from the studies of deixis in linguistics, or Roman Jakobson's 'shifters'. In this tradition, pragmatics is just the studies of deixis (as linguists would put it) or indexical expressions (as philosophers would prefer, Levinson (1983: 55)).

Another formal approach, due to Stalnaker, takes exactly the opposite position from Gazdar's: pragmatics cleans up the context references *before* semantics can do its job. A sentence "together with some features of the context ... determines a proposition; this in turn, together with a possible world, determines a truth value. An interpreted sentence, then, corresponds to a function from contexts into propositions, and a proposition is a function from possible worlds into truth values." (Stalnaker 1972: 385)

The advantage of all these definitions of pragmatics in linguistics and logic is their neatness. But I would still prefer a maybe messy, but more open approach.

3. Some aspects of pragmatics

Going back to the pragmatic question *par excellence*: "How did this utterance come to be produced?", I want to go through a number of areas of language study and try to show how applying this pragmatic question can generate *new* research questions rather than trying to find better answers to *old* questions.

3.1. Dialogue

Historically, one of the first pragmatists was the Greek sophist Protagoras, a contemporary of Plato and Socrates. From the fragments of his works that have been preserved, we can see that he was interested in *context*. For me, the original pragmatic statement is the Protagorean *Man is the measure of all things* reported by Plato in his dialogue *Theaitetos* (St. I 152a). There, Socrates discusses the truth of the statement 'Six is more.' For Protagoras, it depends on the context whether or not this is a true statement: six is more than four but less than twelve. For Plato (or his spokesperson Socrates), on the other hand, 'Six is more' is neither true nor false, but simply devoid of sense. Here, already in the early history of Western thinking (long before the disciplines of linguistics and semiotic had developed), we have a clash of two approaches: Protagoras was interested in rhetoric, Plato in philosophy; Protagoras looked at speech acts in context, Plato only at context-independent statements.

But context leads us immediately to the fundamental role of dialogue. Protagoras

distinguished four types of speech (λόγος): wish, question, answer and command.³ In his classification of speech, Protagoras has no place for those statements that Plato was so very interested in. Protagoras does not even recognize an independent category ‘statement’. For him, there are no statements, only answers to questions. And answers only occur in dialogue.

This echoes (or precludes on) the question *par excellence* of pragmatics: How did this utterance come to be produced? This also means: As an answer *to what* did this utterance come to be produced? Seen from a point of view of dialogue, the basic pragmatic question lets us investigate why an utterance was made as a reaction to an utterance of the partner in dialogue. Asking this question can lead to a study of adjacency pairs, but can also open our eyes to issues like cooperation, accommodation and power structures in interaction.

3.2. Entextualization

Next I want to look at the concept of *text*. We start again with the pragmatic question: “How did this utterance come to be produced?” But what is an utterance? We take part in linguistic activities all the time, but how could we analyze them, if there were not a cultural technique that made it possible to (literally) look at language repeatedly. This is the production of texts. Text is “divorced from its context of action and situation” (Malinowski 1935: 8), but this being divorced from the context has the advantage that a text is transportable in space and time, which an utterance is not. Turning an utterance into a text can be done by memorizing it or writing it down, but also by other types of recording (on tape or other electronic media). This idea was expressed first by the Polish-British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski, but also later by the German linguist Konrad Ehlich, who wrote, “I talk about a text when an utterance of a speaker S is retained after the original speech situation. For this, it needs fixation and storage. For a text, it is always possible to remove it from its speech situation.” (Ehlich 1979: 426, my translation; see also Haberland 1999).⁴

With texts, the speech situation is ‘stretched’ or ‘torn apart’ (Ehlich 2007): speaker and hearer originally had to be in the same place and the same time. After the invention of writing, writer and reader can be in different places in different times. Other techniques (telephone, radio, film, tv, audio and video recordings, internet chat rooms) create other possibilities of ‘stretched’ speech situations either in time, or space, or both.

³ quoted in Diogenes Laertius IX, 53; cf. also Haberland (1985: 381)

⁴ This, of course, also reminds of Bakhtin, who wrote “... any sentence, ... can be repeated an unlimited number of times But as an utterance (or part of an utterance) no one sentence, even if it has only one word, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance (even if it is a quotation).” (1986: 69).

But reducing language from something that occurs to something that can be retained, transmitted and analyzed is *also* an action. This act, too, can be addressed through a variant of the pragmatic question *par excellence*: How come that this speech event has been reduced to a text? ‘Entextualization’, the creation of text from utterances, occurs not only in research, but also in society’s institutions; it is “the process by which circulable texts are produced by extracting discourse from its original context and reifying it as a bounded object” (Bucholtz and Park 1999). Entextualization takes place not only in research of different kinds (including linguistic), it is also practiced in society’s institutions, where it is both one of the basic ways in which institutions can function at all and one of the mechanisms for building and maintaining authority.

Text can be created by entextualizing utterances, but many texts are not created from utterances. They are not transcripts of something spoken (like in research interviews and in parliaments and law courts), but are composed without a pre-existing, ‘entextualizable’ model. Thus it appears that transcription and composition are two different modes of producing a text.

But even texts produced in composition can be seen as containing an implicit dialogue, although only one side of the dialogue is represented in the text, while the voice of the readers remains implicit. Text can be seen as implicit dialogue: “In a live dialog the burden of exposition or argument by means of question and answer is distributed between the participants, whereas in a composition the burden of this discourse rests upon one person alone — the composer. This means that, while the basic semantically complete unit of discourse in a dialog will be an explicit question *plus* a direct answer, in a composition the basic semantically complete unit of discourse will be an answer that contains its question — that is, an assertion.” (Gray 1977: 286)

In terms of Ehlich’s ‘stretched’ or ‘torn apart’ speech situation, one could say that the author is no longer present when the reader approaches the text. The paradox lies in the fact that the text’s understanding is co-constructed by author and reader, although author and reader are not present together in the same situation (which should make co-construction impossible). Thus, the dialogue that the text represents is only implicit. The author has to anticipate the reader’s questions, and the reader has to reconstruct what the author thought were the questions that the reader would ask. “In order to be a successful author, you have to have cooperative readers.” (Mey 1999: 242)

In good texts, which are cohesive and coherent (in the sense of de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981), this cooperative co-construction runs smoothly and apparently effortlessly. In bad texts, the implicit dialogue is lost in the translation from the author’s thoughts into a manifest text.

In a pragmatic approach to text production, Gray’s concept of implicit dialogue provides us with ways of finding an answer to the question, “How did this piece of composition come to be produced?”

3.3. Transcription

One special kind of entextualization is transcription. This is a very specific type of text production which linguists mostly associate with field work and the transcription of data practised by conversation analysts and ethnographic linguists. ‘Inscription of speech into writing’ plays a part in non-academic institutions that we more often associate with politics or the power apparatuses of society like legislative assemblies (parliaments) and courts. There, the taking of minutes or records has a history that predates modern recording techniques. Before 1771, publication of the debates of the Westminster Parliament was a criminal offence (this form of entextualization must have been practised, otherwise there would not have been a need to sanction it). From 1809, Thomas Curson Hansard legally published the Parliamentary debates.

Transcription is also a matter of politics. The process that transforms an utterance into a text is a reduction. It is a process of selection and therefore always ‘partial’, in both senses of the word.

The variant of the pragmatic question *par excellence* that comes up in connection with transcription is, “Why was this utterance transcribed in this way?” What are, then, its implications for the institutions that use transcripts (as discussed by Bucholtz and Park 2009)? Celia Roberts expressed this very clearly in 1997 when she wrote, “As readers, we can ask of any transcription: *How did it come to be produced?* Whose story is it? How much story does it tell?” (Roberts 1997: 170, my italics) (A similar point was made by Judith Green, Maria Franquiz and Carol Dixon: “Transcribing, therefore, is a political act ... a transcript is a text that ‘re’-presents an event; it is not the event itself. Following this logic, what is re-presented is data constructed by a researcher for a particular purpose, not just talk written down.” (Green, Franquiz and Dixon 1997: 172)) The problem has often been that researchers have tended to forget about the data once a transcript was available. This makes it difficult to keep comparing the representation of the event with what it represents. Hence, reduced and partial as the transcript may be, it *appears* as if it were the data itself, not just its representation.

3.4. Language alternation

Now let us have a look at another aspect of the pragmatic question *par excellence*, “How did this utterance come to be produced?” We live in a multilingual world. We all know this, but students of language have often ignored it. The monolingual speech situation has largely been accepted as the norm. Cases like code-switching (or language alternation in a broader sense) have been considered marginal, typical for specific societies. But more generally, in a multilingual society, every utterance implies a choice between languages: why has an utterance been produced *in this language* and not in another?

While multilingualism has traditionally been regarded as limited to particular societies, we have to realize that encounters involving several languages occur more and more in our world of increased transnational contacts. Multilingual communication is

not restricted to what we traditionally consider multilingual societies. The following dialogue is part of a phone call between Denmark and Japan in 1995.⁵ The European customer C has called a *ryokan* in Tokyo to make a reservation for a room, and is talking to the owner A:

- 1 (telephone rings)
 2 A: はい、沢の屋旅館でございます
 3 C: あの、こちらロスキレデ大学の NN です。
 デンマークから電話をかけて約束したいんですが、
 [...]
 20 A: はい、結構です。どうもありがとうございます。
 21 C: どうもありがとう。
 22 A: ええ、今ファクスもございますが。
 23 C: そうですね。あの、ファクスの番号は何号ですか。
 → 24 A: はい、番号は zero three, three eight two two, two two five two.
 25 C: はい、〇三、三八二二、二二五二でした。
 26 A: どうもありがとうございました。
 27 C: さよなら。

The interesting point is the language shift in line 24. After a long conversation in Japanese, involving negotiation about booking a room (omitted here), A remarks (in line 22) that the *ryokan* now has a fax machine. After C's question about the number, A gives it to C but in English. Why does the *ryokan* owner suddenly shift into English, a language that he cannot even be sure that the customer knows (at least, C has not indicated earlier that he knows English)? And why does C repeat the fax number in line 25 in Japanese, thereby both signalling uptake of the information given in line 24 but also refusal to accept the language shift? The variant of the pragmatic question *par excellence* that concerns us here is, "Why was this utterance produced in this language and not in another?"

3.5. Metapragmatic acts

Claudia Caffi has introduced the term "metapragmatics", and we have already mentioned the first of her three senses of this term, viz. the one dealing with the theoretical debate on pragmatics and its central concerns, its epistemological foundations, and the definition of its relevant object and scope.

Leaving out Caffi's second sense,⁶ I will focus on the third sense of metapragmat-

⁵ The example is taken from Haberland (2007: 134), where a rendering in Latin script and a glossing is provided.

⁶ "This [second] kind of metapragmatics, which can be related to the problems of the universals of human communication, is transcendental in a Kantian sense inasmuch as it deals with the constitutive

ics, which has to do with the judgments of appropriateness regarding one's own and other people's communicative behavior. These judgments feed the 'know-how' of controlling and planning, as well as giving and receiving feedback on, the ongoing interaction. (Caffi 1998: 581)

Combining Caffi's third sense of metapragmatics and Mey's concept of "pragmatic act" (Mey 2001: 212) allows us to introduce the concept of a 'metapragmatic act'. Metapragmatic acts are those acts in which we both explicitly and (mostly) implicitly monitor what we and others are doing in interaction. Frequently this is done through something we *say* but also often through interruptions, comments or repairs. Like other pragmatic acts, metapragmatic acts do not necessarily include specific speech acts. Metapragmatic acts can be realized by silence and even by language shift: the language shift in line 24 of the example of section 3.4 can be interpreted as a metapragmatic act. So can the ensuing failure to take up the language shift in line 25. It is not obvious, though, what these act actually *do*, i.e. what they are acts *of*. We still have not answered the question why A shifts into English (accommodating to the customer?) in line 24 and why C stubbornly sticks to speaking Japanese in line 25. In fact, C's answering A's giving the fax number in English by repeating it in Japanese can both be interpreted as an act of acknowledgment and an act of repair.

Another example of a metapragmatic act is the following, taken from a study of a Greek mother tongue class in Sweden (Konstantinou 2008: 121f.). A and B are students and T is their teacher:

- 1 A: Και:: κάν- (0.5) και κάναμε πρακτική στο ρεσεψιόν
Ke kan- ke káname praktiki sto resepsión
 A::nd di- and we.did practice at.the reception
 (tr) and we did our on the-job-training at the reception
 → 2 (2.5) .hh hhh
 → 3 T: έτσι δε λέγεται↑ ρεσεψιόν↑ (turns her gaze to the class)
étsi ðe légete resepsión
 so not is.called reception
 (tr) Isn't that what it's called? reception?
 → 4 A: Γυποδοχή↑Γ
ipodochi
 reception
 5 B: Λυποδοχή↑↓
 6 T: Γυποδοχ:χή↓Γ
 reception
 7 A, B: Λhahahaha: ↓

In this excerpt, the students insist on ‘purist’, but actually unidiomatic language use. They reject the teacher’s correct use of a French loan (*resepsión*) for ‘front desk’ (of a hotel) and replace it by an autochthonous Greek word (*ipodoçí*), a lexical item appropriate in a hospital, but not in a hotel. This is a metapragmatic act, a “labelling of preceding actions ... or subsequent ones” (Caffi 1998: 585).

Actually, there are several metapragmatic acts within the excerpt: in line 2, A’s hesitation is followed by an inbreath (tentatively: “I said something wrong”), in line 3, the teacher’s asserts that the expression was correct (meaning “go on, you’re OK”), and in lines 4 and 5, the two students suggest a repair (“this is the way we should talk now”).

Metapragmatic acts are regulative acts in speech communication, but unlike speech acts in the narrower sense, they do not have to have a propositional content. Hesitation in line 2 is an act, as is the inbreath in the same line. The utterance in line 3 is an explicit metapragmatic act which also happens to be a speech act (a rhetorical question), and finally, the repair acts in line 4 are metapragmatic acts which also are metacommunicative acts: providing a ‘better’ word, a repair.

Metapragmatic acts reflect norms. In this case, an act of ‘repair’ (actually of self-repair) comments on the norm of purity: this is a language class, one should avoid loan-words. The norm is ‘languages have to be kept apart at all cost’, even at the cost of using the wrong expression.

Here, too, asking for the meaning of an utterance does not make much sense, at least not in the sense of a meaning carried by some propositional content. Among the acts quoted above, some have no propositional content at all; a single word has only lexical meaning, but uttering it as a repair makes *sense*. Asking why this metapragmatic act has been performed, in contrast, is another variant of the pragmatic question *par excellence*.

4. Conclusion

There are three possible objections I would like to address.

The first was formulated by Professor He Ziran in Guangzhou after a lecture that I gave during the Pragmatics summer school in July 2006. He asked, “But isn’t it much more difficult to teach pragmatics as a perspective rather than a discipline?” My answer is that the existing textbooks (especially Jacob Mey’s “Pragmatics”) show that this does not have to be the case for graduate students.

The second objection is: does the perspective approach not simply amount to characterizing pragmatics as a “critical rather than purely academic endeavour” (Verschuereen 1999: 869)? Not necessarily. It all depends on the questions. If you look at language use from the point of user and context, it might be more difficult to avoid the socially relevant (“critical”) questions, but there is no guarantee that they will be asked. So “perspective” pragmatics is not *necessarily* “critical” pragmatics.

The third question is, does the perspective approach not blur the borderline between pragmatics and sociolinguistics?

This has to be taken seriously, since sociolinguistics often has been characterized by questions similar to the pragmatic question *par excellence*. In 1972, Labov described the basic sociolinguistic question as “posed by the need to understand why anyone says anything” (1972: 207). Beatriz Lavandera elaborated on this by asking, “What does anyone say anything for?” (1978: 171) Florian Coulmas (2005) has characterized sociolinguistics as the study of speakers’ choices. All this shows that both pragmatics and sociolinguistics share an interest in understanding why people communicate in the way they do and what choices they make. Similarly, the concern with social rather than referential meanings as expressed by the Dutch sociolinguists René Appel, Gerard Hubers and Guus Meijer (1976: 23) goes beyond semantics as the study of speaker-independent meanings exactly like pragmatics goes beyond semantics by taking the speakers and users of language into account. But sociolinguistics is concerned with choices and meanings as *patterned* within a social group or between social groups, while pragmatics looks at the single speech act or pragmatic act itself. This act occurs in society, is shaped by it and contributes to society’s reproduction, but it not necessarily indexical of the speaker’s group membership. So there is still a division of labor between sociolinguistics and pragmatics even if one adopts the ‘perspective’ approach, even though the borderline is certainly less sharp than in the case of the sub-discipline approach (which actually is motivated by the desire for clear-cut methodological borders). But pragmatics still is different from sociolinguistics. There are many things that pragmatists do and that sociolinguists do not. The microanalysis of conversation, the analysis of the relationship between discourse and text, and the description of language alternation in communication can be helpful for sociolinguistic analyses, but are not sociolinguistics in themselves. The communities of practice for sociolinguists and pragmatists may overlap, but they do not coincide.

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