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Review of Philosophical Perspectives for Pragmatics

Mohammad A. Salmani Nodoushan

Review of

Sbisà, Marina/Östman, Jan-Ola/Verschueren, Jef (eds.) (2011): *Philosophical Perspectives for Pragmatics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia.: John Benjamins. (= *Handbook of Pragmatic* 10).

Mohammad Ali Salmani Nodoushan (Tehran)

1   Introduction

Philosophical Perspectives for Pragmatics is the 10th book in the series *Handbook of Pragmatics (HoP)* edited by Jef Verschueren and Jan-Ola Östman. The main theme of this book is the interface between pragmatics and philosophy; it reviews the philosophical cornerstones of pragmatics and underscores how philosophy has both inspired and troubled pragmatics. Reading this title will provide readers with information concerning people who advanced pragmatics, trends in pragmatics, contributions of philosophy to pragmatics, the role of cultural context in pragmatics, and so on.

2   Book structure

The book consists of 25 chapters of varying lengths. The main topics covered in the book focus on analytical philosophy, truth-conditional semantics, and pragmatics. As stated in the preface of the book, this title, along with the other titles in the *HoP* series, aims at (a) disseminating the body of existing knowledge on and about pragmatic aspects of language, (b) stimulating various fields which benefit from this knowledge by making the knowledge accessible to an interdisciplinary community of scholars who employ different methodologies to approach the same general subject area from different perspectives, and (c) creating a significant degree of theoretical coherence.

Chap. 1, "Introduction" (Marina Sbisà), strives to establish the interface between philosophy, pragmatics, and truth-conditional semantics. Being one of the editors of this title, the author of this chapter tries to justify the selection and sequencing of the chapters in this volume by claiming that the decision has been informed by philosophical sources of pragmatics. The author argues that philosophical work due to its elaboration of various conceptions of meaning is related to pragmatics not only in that the object of pragmatic research is human communicative activity which requires taking for granted that the texts are meaningful, but also in that defining meaning is not a matter of philosophy and semantics alone, but also of pragmatics. Philosophy and pragmatics are claimed to be related in their treatment of truth-conditional meaning, meaning as use, and meaning as speakers intentions. The author also addresses the issue of speech as action and also the issues of mind and self. The main conclusion of the chapter is that a "traditional way of viewing the relationship between pragmatics and philosophy would be to say that pragmatics needs philosophy in order to clarify its own" (Sbisà 2011: 9).

In the second chapter of the book, "Analytical philosophy: Ordinary language philosophy" (Marina Sbisà), the author takes analytic(al) philosophy to be an area of philosophy that consists of a certain range of philosophical inquiries and doctrines which have developed from the last decade of the 19th century to present times. Although the author clearly states that analytical philosophers need language, and more specifically how it is used to formulate logical notations and propositions, to solve philosophical problems, she fails to show how language in general, and pragmatics in particular, can benefit from analytical philosophy. The mere inclusion of a chapter on analytical philosophy in a book which aims at illuminating the

philosophical cornerstones of pragmatics does not help much. Rather, it adds to the confusion of less experienced readers. Nevertheless, the chapter provides a brief overview of Wittgenstein, Frege, Moore, Russell, Carnap, and Oxford philosophers of language (Austin, Strawson, and Grice). Towards the end of the chapter, the author defines semiotics and, quoting Carnap, argues that "the whole study of natural languages should belong to pragmatics" (Carnap 1942, cited in Sbis à 2011:21). The main conclusion of the chapter is that:

> . . . independently of their taking sides for one or other philosophical claim about language or mind, philosophers in the analytical tradition keep discussing such problems as reference, force, attitude attribution, interpersonal or cross-cultural understanding, all of which are at the same time objects of pragmatic research. This will most likely keep on creating opportunities for fruitful encounters between analytical philosophy and pragmatics. (Sbisà 2011: 23)

The third chapter of the book, "John L. Austin" (Marina Sbisà), is devoted to the place of Austin in pragmatics. The author compares Austin to later-phase Wittgenstein but claims that, like Wittgenstein, Austin links philosophical investigations to the consideration of the workings of ordinary language and the whole range of language uses. The author distinguishes Austin from Wittgenstein in that the former believes that the investigation of ordinary language could not only "correct philosophical mistakes (e.g. prevent pseudo-problems from arising), but also provide substantial contributions to the discussion and possibly the solution of philosophical issues" (Sbisà 2011: 26). She pays tribute to Austin by highlighting her claim that together with "Grice and Searle, Austin is one of the philosophers who has most influenced the birth and development of pragmatics" (Sbisà 2011: 35). The author also provides the reader with a brief overview of epistemology, philosophy of language and philosophy of action.

Chap. 4, "Mikhail Bakhtin" (Martina Björklund), claims that Bakhtin should be credited as the first modern scholar of pragmatics: "In fact, Bakhtin was engaged in linguistic pragmatics before there was a name for this kind of study. From the late 1950s, he himself termed the type of linguistic study he was interested in *metalinguistics*" (Björklund 2011: 41). In describing the main tenets of Bakhtin's pragmatic perspectives, Björklund notices that the dialogic conception of language was central to Bakhtin's thought. Björklund argues that the term *dialogic* derives from dialogue and finds three meanings in Bakhtin's arguments: (a) a view of the whole human existence in the world, (b) every written and/or spoken piece of language, and (c) individual/interpersonal discourses/interactions. Another tenet of Bakhtin's dialogic view of language has to do with *heteroglossia* or the stratification of any language into different socioideological 'languages' which are forms for conceptualizing specific world views (Bakhtin 1981, cited in Björklund 2011: 43). A third tenet is *polyphony* which stands for the artistic key or the novelistic form of language or "the entirety of the interaction of several consciousnesses, of which no one fully becomes the object of any other one" (Bakhtin 1973, cited in Björklund 2011: 44). Björklund also overviews the concepts of metalinguistics, speech genres, and carnival, and concludes the chapter by claiming that, "by the end of the 1970s, a dialogic conception of language had become an axiom in linguistics, and contemporary linguistics, enriched with pragmatics, is well equipped to answer Bakhtin's challenge" (Björklund 2011: 50).

In Chap. 5, Claudia Bianchi addresses the issue of "Contextualism" from the two perspectives of literalism/semantic minimalism and radical contextualism, and devotes a section to the discussion of indexicalism as the intermediate stage between the two, and by relating contextualism to syntax and logic. After a discussion of minimalism, indexicalism, and contextualism, Bianchi focuses on the roles played by Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle, and Travis in furthering our understanding of contextualism and concludes that "the radical

contextualist perspective indicates a kind of semantic context sensitivity that has nothing to do with the forms of contextual dependence that minimalism can account for, i.e. ambiguity, ellipsis, indexicality or implicit meaning" (Bianchi 2011: 68).

Tony Schirato's chapter (Chap. 6) addresses the concept of "Deconstruction" by starting with a definition of the concept which begins with what deconstruction is not:

> it is not a concept, program or system of philosophy. It is perhaps best defined as a strategy of reading, writing and analysis specifically aimed at the 'textual unconscious'; that is to say, it works to bring to light aspects of textuality such as idealisms, paradoxes, contradictions, excesses and differences which are 'repressed' or passed over in silence by the text, but which, at the same time, enable narratives, discourses and systems of thought—that is to say, texts—to be produced.   (Schirato 2011: 71).

Drawing on Heidegger's ideas, Schirato argues in this chapter that:

> text and context are both 'there' as identities, and 'not there' in that they bear the 'trace' (a particularly important term in deconstruction) of their otherness, so that they must be understood as being different from themselves. For deconstruction there is nothing outside the (con)text, but, at the same time, there is really no pure textual or contextual identity, either (Schirato 2011: 73).

Schirato's treatment of *Deconstruction* goes on up to the last page of the chapter with no clear connection with pragmatics on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. Close to the end of the chapter a short and quick attempt is made to link the concept to linguistics, and it is claimed that currently "deconstructive approaches are employed by some discourse analysts, Hallidayians and stylisticians such as Norman Fairclough, Bob Hodge, Gunther Kress and Terry Threadgold" (Schirato 2011: 77), but the attempt fails to show its relation to philosophy and pragmatics.

In Chap. 7, Filip Buekens connects "Epistemology" to semantics and pragmatics by building on Wittgenstein's ideas and also by including "discussions about what it means to follow a linguistic rule and what it means to know that one follows a rule (of language) correctly" (Buekens 2011: 80). He distinguishes between the holistic and the non-holistic approaches to meaning, but does not clarify the connection between epistemology and pragmatics. Closely connected to this chapter is Chap. 8, "Epistemology of testimony" (Paul Faulkner), which argues that "testimonial beliefs permeate every aspect of our cognitive life" and gives us grounds to accept that "one thing is evidence for the other" (Faulkner 2011: 82). The chapter attempts to link epistemology to sense-reference relations and semiotics. Although this can be fully understood by experts in pragmatics, less experienced pragmaticists will find the chapter quite confusing.

In Chap. 9, Luisa Martín Rojo and Angel Gabilondo Pujol focus on "Michel Foucault." The main strength of the chapter is the description of discourse as practice and discourse as knowledge and power which has some connotations for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The chapter claims that Foucault's ideas have had a deep and wide influence on discourse studies in that they "charted a completely new understanding of discourse in its relation to knowledge and power, and proposed some influential procedures and guiding notions, such as *problematization* or *experimentation*" and argues that "Foucault's discursive practices could be revealing for the relation between modalities of thinking and the use of pragmatic procedures" (Martín Rojo/Pujol 2011: 100–101).

In Chap. 10, Frank Brisard reviews the contribution of "H.P. Grice" to philosophical pragmatics by claiming that Grice recourses to psychology in explaining that "meaning may at first seem perfectly compatible with the heavy emphasis on mind and mental constructs in

the cognitive sciences" (2011: 120f.). The author concludes that Grice is still one of the prime sources of inspiration for tackling phenomena which are conveniently called pragmatic.

Chap. 11, "Hermeneutics" (Piet Van de Craen), begins with a description of the origins of hermeneutics and addresses some of the aspects of the evolution of hermeneutic thinking by focusing on the nature of the hermeneutic enterprise and the hermeneutical circle. It then traces hermeneutics to such areas of linguistics as structuralism, linguistic anthropology, cognitive linguistics, and conversation analysis. It concludes that hermeneutics relates to pragmatics in that it addresses the issue of how concepts are expressed, explained, and translated in language.

Chap. 12, focuses on a description of indexicals and demonstratives. It distinguishes between pure indexicals, and essential indexicals, and approaches indexicals as singular terms as well as anaphors. Eros Corazza concludes the chapter "Indexicals and demonstratives" by claiming that indexicals have a crucial role to play in dealing with the problem of context sensitivity.

Chap. 13, "Intensional logic" (Paul Gochet), adopts an Aristotelian perspective to address the concepts of intension and extension, and to relate them to a description of context. The author addresses the Frege-Carnap treatment of intensional contexts, and also argues about the problem of hybrid contexts in which "the same subexpression occurs both in an extensional and in an intensional context" (Gochet 2011: 155). The chapter also addresses the issues of Intensional constructions in natural language, inadequacies of the standard semantics of intensional logic, hyperintensionality, and the like. Perhaps this is the most important chapter in the whole book whose relation to both philosophy and pragmatics is clear. A major weakness of the chapter, however, is its treatment of too many concepts in too little space. The same author has also contributed Chap. 14, "Modal logic," as well as öl, "Model-theoretic semantics," to this volume. Chap. 14 connects Aristotle's modal logic to present day theories of linguistic modality, especially the distinction between belonging, necessarily belonging, and being able to belong. It describes the roles that 'deictic frame' and 'frame of reference' play in relating tense logic to pragmatics. In chapter 15, Gochet focuses on "the *theory of meaning* whose main concepts, apart from meaning itself, are synonymy, significance and analyticity, and the theory of reference whose main concepts are those of naming, truth, denotation and extension" (Gochet 2011: 171). He then focuses on layers of context (i.e., situational context vs. linguistic context or context vs. cotext) and presents a 6-fold model-theory for context which employs a record of the surface structures of the previous sentences, a set of discourse states, a set of indexical anchors, a partial order of entities and propositions, linguistic knowledge, and knowledge about the world.

Chap. 16, "Charles Morris" (Susan Petrilli), focuses on Morris's contribution to semiotics and especially his "intention to develop a general theory of symbolism on the conviction that the mind identifies with the symbolic process" (Petrilli 2011: 180). The author compares Morris's pragmatics and Peirce's pragmaticism to arrive at a description of behavioral semiotics. It is argued that Morris "searched for sign-processes in the wide class of mediation processes," and was "convinced that mediation processes did not always involve signs" (Petrilli 2011: 187). It is concluded that Morris should be praised for the distinction between pragmatism, the practical, and action.

Chap. 17, "Notation in formal semantics" (Walter De Mulder), introduces some of the most currently used notational devices in Montague semantics. It also answers questions that are reminiscent of the ones that are asked in conversation analysis. The chapter also analyzes the role of context in semantics. To attain its aims, the chapter describes lambda abstraction and lambda conversion, quantifiers, intentionality, and contexts. All in all, the chapter has a semantic rather than pragmatic focus.

Chap. 18, "Phenomenology" (Peter Reynaert and Jef Verschueren), addresses the concept of phenomenology by defining it as a philosophical method for rigorously investigating subjectively experienced 'phenomena'. After a brief overview of the history and basic tenets of the phenomenological movement, the authors try focus on the interface between phenomenology, linguistics, and the social sciences to draw conclusion and implications for pragmatics. The chapter concludes that the "phenomenological emphasis on the role of consciousness and the importance of immediate experiences could be invoked to motivate and inspire a straightforward pragmatic perspective centered around the actual functioning of language." (Reynaert/Verschueren 2011: 221).

In Chap. 19, "Philosophy of action" (Filip Buekens), the relationship between mind and action is explored. To develop his line of argumentation, the author employs Aristotle's *Ethica Eicomachea* to argue that an action is the conclusion of a practical syllogism. Closely connected to the philosophy of action is the philosophy of language by Asa Kasher which comprises the next chapter of the book. Chap. 20, "Philosophy of language," aims at enhancing our understanding of the role "played by language within the framework of major facets of human life, such as thought, knowledge or scientific explanation" and also "our understanding of language itself" (Buekens 2011: 228). The author claims that pragmatics, in some way, is involved in the pursuit of both of these purposes. The author concludes that Philosophical theories, "though of a programmatic nature, have made important contributions to the development of pragmatics, mostly by creating conceptual frameworks for theoretical discussions of highly important families of linguistic facts and by putting forward and examining in a critical way general theoretical claims about ways of language use (Buekens 2011:232). Along the same lines, Chap. 21, "Philosophy of mind" (Stefaan E. Cuypers), describes how the philosophy of mind is naturalized. It addresses the mind-body problem, and focuses on the problem of intentionality or the status of folk psychology to arrive at its discussion of psychosemantics. It then connects the previous issues to a discussion of cognitive pragmatics.

The author of Chap. 22, "Possible worlds semantics" (Paul Gochet), begins his discussion of the topic by focusing on some logical problems and then arrives at some possible worlds semantics by combining the idea of possible worlds with that of truth. The author then briefly reviews the key concepts of possible worlds semantics, and then moves from possible worlds semantics to pragmatics. Chap. 23 addresses "Reference and descriptions," and Chap. 24 focuses on the issue of truth-conditional semantics. Chap. 25 distinguishes between universal and transcendental pragmatics, and finally Chap. 26 addresses the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein on philosophical pragmatics.

3   Focused evaluation

Perhaps the main issue with this title is what is claimed to be its main strength: the selection and sequencing of the chapters. Although I accept that some of the materials presented throughout the book belong to the contribution of philosophy to pragmatics, I should admit that the selection and sequencing of the chapters causes a great deal of confusion for readers. The title of this volume, *Philosophical perspectives for pragmatics*, clearly raises readers' expectation, and they are persuaded that they will be reading a volume solely devoted to 'philosophical' perspectives on 'pragmatics'. However, the inclusion of content which focuses on semantics runs counter to reader expectations. Moreover, there are chapters in the book which focus on philosophy and philosophers without highlighting their contribution to pragmatics. Chap. 6 on deconstruction, for example, belongs in a book on literary criticism or dramatic arts rather than in a volume which aims at highlighting the role of philosophy in pragmatics.

Moreover, the chapters that pertain to semantics are for the most part unrelated to pragmatics. Nevertheless, the editors acknowledge that semiotics has been subdivided the American pragmatist philosopher Charles Morris into pragmatics, syntax, and semantics, yet this places semantics, syntax, and pragmatics on a par; they are sister terms that gather under the hyperneme semiotics. Being sisters, and genetically connected does not justify the inclusion of chapters on semantics in a book that has to do with pragmatics. This is misleading for the less experienced reader who may be confused to think that semantics is part and parcel of pragmatics.

In addition, there are sections and chapters in this volume that are misleading in that they tend to misfile the not-purely-philosopher with philosophers. Bakhtin, Morris, and Foucault, for instance, are not 100% philosophers. Their being called philosophers in this issue certainly raises concerns. Nevertheless, their works have a lot to do with pragmatics and also relate to philosophy. However, care should be taken not to group people who are not purely philosophers with those who are.

Still another problem with the book is that the boarders of philosophy, psychology, discourse, semantics, pragmatics, and semiotics have not been clearly marked. The book looks like a supermarket where you can find a lot of goods of different kinds, but where there is no clear directory or grouping criterion to give you a sense of organization. It is rather encyclopedic in nature in the sense that the different chapters have been collected and grouped together without any rigorous grouping criteria. It would be advisable for the publisher to ask an experienced author (either a linguist or a philosopher) to write a strong preface for the volume and identify where in the philosophical-pragmatic puzzle each chapter could exactly be placed so that the reader would finish reading the book with a feeling of comprehension and integration. As such, the book somewhat fails to achieve its stated objective of "creating a significant degree of theoretical coherence" (Sbisà/Östman/Verschueren: xiii).

A minor weakness of the book is that some of the authors have contributed several chapters of which the topics and concentration are quite varied. For one thing, Sbisà has written the introduction (Chap. 1), the chapter on analytical philosophy (Chap. 2), and the chapter on Austin (Chap. 3). The same is true about Joachim Leilich and Paul Gochet although I found the chapters by Paul Gochet the most informative contribution to this volume.

4   Conclusion

All in all, the title is more like a concise encyclopedia than a unified book; its sketchy and choppy nature makes it quite hard for the less experienced readers to find the connections between chapters and their overall relation to philosophy and pragmatics. Nevertheless, the material presented in the book reviews the background from which pragmatics has taken inspiration and with which it is constantly confronted. The book does provide its readers with information about authors relevant to the development of pragmatics, trends or areas in philosophy that are directly or indirectly relevant for the definition of the main concepts in pragmatics and the characterization of its cultural context. In spite of its flaws and shortcomings, the book has informative content, and I recommend that people interested in philosophy and pragmatics read it.

At the time of publication of this review, Mohammad Ali Salmani Nodoushan is affiliated with IECF, Iran.

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