

Introduction: Inquiries in Philosophical Pragmatics – Theoretical Developments



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Together with the volume “Inquiries in philosophical pragmatics: Linguistic and theoretical issues,” this book collects selected contributions to the conference *Pragmasophia II* held in Lisbon in 2018. The purpose of this twofold selection of essays is primarily to gather the state of the art on the interconnection between pragmatics and philosophy. While the field of pragmatics has developed noticeably in the last years, leading to excellent and famous journals in the field of linguistics and communication such as *Pragmatics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Intercultural Pragmatics*, *Pragmatics and Society*, and *Lingua*, the philosophical dimension of this crucial discipline seems to be left in the background. The aforementioned journals aim at promoting and publishing interdisciplinary research on topics socially important, such as language learning, intercultural communication, political discourse, and multimedia communication. However, among the great number of contributions focusing on traditionally “core” linguistic issues (phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) and more empirical communication studies, the philosophical dimension of pragmatics almost disappears. In the world of peer-reviewed journals, the strongest effort to revendicate the central role of philosophy and theoretical developments in pragmatics has been made by *Intercultural Pragmatics*, whose editor, Istvan Kecskes, launched in 2018 the *Thematic Issue in Pragmatics and Philosophy*, managed by Alessandro Capone.

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The relative underrepresentation of theoretical contributions in the arena of journals does not mirror the importance of philosophy, and theoretical and methodological research, in the field of pragmatics, and the attention that it deserves and draws. This role has been made manifest by the success of the Springer book series *Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy and Psychology*, edited by Alessandro Capone. This book series, which counts at present 23 titles, has reached impressive distribution figures in 7 years (almost 300000 downloads for the digital editions). By displaying the most recent works by the most important philosophers working on theoretical and methodological pragmatic issues, this book series intends to offer a constant update on this almost hidden but essential dimension of pragmatics.

The two volumes intend to explore from distinct perspectives the role of pragmatics in social sciences. Pragmatics is a complex discipline, commonly defined as the study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language (Huang 2014, p. 2; Jaszczolt 2018, p. 134). This generic definition is in fact very specific, as it addresses in particular two crucial dimensions of meaning, which are: 1) *the linguistic acts* (how words can be used to do things, using Austin's terminology, Austin 1962, p. 2), and 2) *the ways in which the linguistic context determines the proposition expressed by a given sentence in that context* (Stalnaker 1970, p. 287), namely how we interpret and comprehend utterances (Kecskes 2013, p. 21). These two objects of study have been addressed from two distinct and interrelated approaches, a philosophical and a linguistic one. The first one takes a top-down perspective, focusing on the conditions and the principles underlying meaning and interpretation, illustrating how they can explain the phenomena we can observe. The second moves from the analysis of linguistic data – which include texts and discourses in different languages, different types of dialogues, different types of interactions, and different modes for expressing meaning – looking for the regularities that govern our production and processing.

The philosophical and the linguistic perspectives are captured in these two volumes, each devoted to the two natures of pragmatics. They both follow a similar path of inquiry, moving from the classical topics and methods to the newest challenges of the discipline, namely new theoretical viewpoints or new domains of study. The first volume is devoted to the theoretical developments, namely the distinct philosophical perspectives that are laying the grounds for the growth of this field of study in different directions. Thus, the more explored themes are progressively joined by new methodological proposals that point at the interconnections between pragmatics and discourse studies or conversational analysis. The second volume pursues a symmetrical endeavor, starting from the classical linguistic analyses and more established methods and moving to pragmatic accounts of specific activity types and institutional contexts of language use, until proposing explorations in the new areas of schizophrenic discourse and multimodal communication.

This first volume intends to contribute to the dialogue between philosophers and linguists, trying to broaden the boundaries of this discipline defined by the crucial notions of context and verbal action. To this purpose, the contributions are collected in an order that reflects the core and the frontiers of pragmatics, the former constituted by the classical and more philosophical topics as quantifiers, semantic

intentions and semantics, and common knowledge, and the latter exploring areas such as the relationship between pragmatics and other fields, such as argumentation and discourse analysis. Between these two poles of theoretical developments, we can find new theoretical challenges to some basic pragmatic problems, such as pure indexicals, deferred reference, polysemy, explicatures and indirect reports.

The first broad category of papers is characterized by a purely philosophical approach, which establishes the foundations of the field of pragmatics. The first three papers discuss the role of intentions, semantics, and common knowledge in pragmatics, while the fourth analyzes a very specific issue, the semantics and pragmatics of “only,” through a logical investigation.

In “[Three Mistakes About Semantic Intentions](#),” Devitt argues that in semantics three commonly accepted paradigms need to be discussed and corrected. First, intentions to refer are considered to determine reference, but this view is shown to be implausible, incomplete, redundant, and misleading. Second, the common view on Gricean “intention-based-semantics” is that speaker meanings are constituted by the speakers’ communicative intentions. However, this claim cannot be taken to mean that it is essential to the meaningful use of language that it involve an intention to communicate. Rather, Devitt claims, meaning is constituted by the content of the thought expressed. The last misconception concerns the belief constraints that Griceans normally maintain to exist on what a speaker can intend to communicate by an utterance (such as, “X cannot intend to A unless X believes that she will A”). However, Devitt shows how these constraints cannot be accepted neither if taken as constitutive or normative.

Intentions lead to another fundamental topic of pragmatics, namely the relationship between reasoning and common knowledge. As Warner underscores in “[Common-Knowledge-Based Pragmatics](#),” pragmatics involves a kind of ampliative inference, a complex type of reasoning commonly described as inference to the best explanation, application of general communication principles, or induction. This sophisticated type of reasoning is shown by the author to incur a coordination issue: how can speakers and audiences reason in the required ways? This chapter explores the role of common knowledge in the speaker-hearer coordination game building on the insights from game theories, which define common knowledge as a recursive belief state in which people are know something, know they know it, know they know they know it, ad infinitum. According to Warner, common knowledge arises from the communication roles that an interaction creates: by perceiving their mutual roles in an interactions, the interlocutors commonly know that the conditions for the implicatures hold, and that reasoning is attributed to speakers and hearers.

One of the central challenges of philosophical approaches to pragmatics is to define its place within the “realm of meaning.” Two opposite views characterize this discussion. On the one hand, semanticists consider semantics the primary vehicle of meaning, maintaining that the encoded semantic content is sufficient or almost sufficient for determining truth conditions. On the other hand, pragmaticists claim that truth conditions can be attributed only to an *enriched* semantic representation, namely a development of the logical form that results from the encoded (semantic)

meaning. However, in “[The Primacy of Semantics and How to Understand it](#),” Miscevic underscores that according to this latter view the relationship between semantics and pragmatics becomes unclear, as no “firm guidance” can be derived from the encoded meaning. The author addresses this conflict by proposing an intermediate position, in which the semantic content – like an anaphora – provides guidance to truth-conditions, partially determining them. Unlike semanticists, he acknowledges the role of pragmatics in fully determining the propositional content.

These first three contributions offer discussions on the general foundations of pragmatics. The fourth chapter focuses instead on a very specific issue, but offers at the same time an illustration of the applications of logical methodologies to the analysis of semantic and pragmatic puzzles. In “[Negative Quantifier Noun Phases and Negative Polarity Items – the Horn-Atlas Debate 1991 – 2018](#),” Atlas develops an overview of the modern developments and a solution to the problem of the most studied and discussed “exponible,” namely the quantifier “only.” *Exponibilia* are defined as propositions, such as “Only Socrates is wise,” which require “further analysis in order to lay bare their underlying logical form and to make clear under what conditions they can be said to be true or false” (Ashworth 1973, p. 137). These propositions need to be expounded normally in a conjunction of two or more simpler propositions; for example, the aforementioned statement can be expressed as “Socrates is wise and no one other than Socrates is wise.” Exponible is commonly used to refer to specific terms such as “only,” “every,” “cease,” characterized by a complex semantic analysis (an unpacking) (Horn 2011). Atlas reviews the modern treatment of this problem, and highlights the weaknesses of the existing proposals related to treatment of exponible propositions in terms of assertion or excluding force. Based on the logical analysis of “few N,” Atlas shows how the treatment of “only” in terms of negation or exclusion can be considered as a mistake.

These theoretical researches in pragmatics are followed by a second group of papers that, by proposing new theoretical explorations and new methods of inquiry, bring the core and the frontier of pragmatic research closer. Thus, observing some excerpts from an American drama film, in “[Speech-Act-Theoretic Explanations of Problems of Pure Indexicals](#),” Oishi observes that the standard theory of reference concerning the pronouns *I* and *you* (classified as pure indexicals) cannot account for the complexity of their use. Drawing on Goffman’s (1981) distinction among an *animator*, a *principal*, and an *author* and correlating them with Austin’s speech act theory, she shows how these two theories can be integrated leading to an innovative interpretative method. She shows three types of correspondences: 1) between “a body engaged in acoustic activity” and the *performer* of a locutionary act; 2) between the discourse entity who is committed to what the words say and the *addresser* (the utterer of certain words to produce a certain conventional effect); and 3) between the entity who has selected what and how needs to be expressed and the speaker. Based on this parallelism, she argues that the use of “pure indexicals” can provide an instrument for identifying the interlocutors’ commitments and communicative intentions – and more specifically the types of speech acts identified by Austin as “expositives.”

Reference is also the topic of Saka's analysis of a specific type of reference, pervasive of our language but neglected by the literature, called "[Perspective Reference](#)." Perspective reference characterizes semantically defective sentences such as "I will deliver my baby in 3 months," which are regarded as not literally or technically true – due to the fact that the implication that the referent exists fails. Based on experimental studies, Saka observes how such sentences loosely convey a truth based on the perceived similarity or causal relation between their intensional meaning and reference.

Polysemy is the subject matter of the following two chapters. In her chapter "[Categorization, Memory and Linguistic Uses: What Happens in the Case of Polysemy](#)," Basile combines the semiotics and cognitive aspects of polysemy with the recent developments of lexical pragmatics. Polysemy is regarded as a communicative phenomenon, in which the sematic dimension – related to the encoded lexical concepts that underdetermine the speaker's intended concepts – necessarily interacts with pragmatic inferences based on the interlocutors' capacity to attribute mental states to each other. The semantic constraints and the mutual attribution of intentions results, according to the author, in a negotiation of multiple meanings.

The problem of underspecification of meaning is an essential aspect of the pragmatic analysis of polysemy, to which the chapter entitled "[Interpretation of Copredicative Sentences: A Rich Underspecification Account of Polysemy](#)" is devoted. In her study, Ortega-Andrés addresses the analysis and interpretation of words associated with several related senses considering a specific and problematic category, copredicative words. Copredication refers to the use of one polysemous word to express simultaneously two or more related senses in a sentence, such as "book" in "The books are thick and interesting." While most of the open-class words we use are polysemous, one a limited number thereof is copredicative. However, they constitute a challenge to the existing theories of underspecification, which the author classifies in three groups – core meaning approaches, thin semantic theories, and rich semantic models – according to the kind of information lexically encoded and the access to the specific senses of polysemous words. The theoretical insights are combined in this paper with a strong empirical orientation, supporting her philosophical insights with the assessment of experimental studies. In this endeavor, she reviews the existing experiments conducted and the results drawn to support a novel theoretical approach, based on a richer account of semantic structure, in which the general knowledge about the world is included inside the "lexical meaning."

The following essay, "[First Person Implicit Indirect Reports in Disguise](#)," concerns one of the crucial phenomena involved in the pragmatic enrichment of the semantic representation of an utterance, commonly referred to as "explicatures." Capone addresses the boundaries of explicatures, namely cases in which the semantic representation of an utterance needs to be enriched in ways that cannot be predicted considering the superficial structure. For examples, first-person utterances expressing events that the speaker could not experience in first person or cannot possibly remember present a disguised polyphony, where an explicature of the kind, "I was told that..." is necessary for determining what is said actually. These "implicit

indirect reports” are not part of what is said explicitly, but they are conditions thereof. This paper thus hints at a problematic boundary between what is said and what is meant, and the relationship between the former and the knowledge or assumptions necessary for determining the specific semantic representation of an utterance.

The last section of this volume presents some new trends in the developments of pragmatics. One of the new frontiers of philosophical approaches to pragmatics is constituted by disciplines such as argumentation theory and discourse analysis, which are increasingly taking into account pragmatic topics and applying pragmatic methods and theories. These domains and these new explorations provide new perspectives and new challenges to the traditional approaches. Argumentation theory is essentially pragmatic, as arguments are defined based on their pragmatic nature (solve a difference between interlocutors, see Walton 1990), or the complex speech act that they express (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). However, without approaching problems such as relevance, presupposition, and implicatures, argumentation can only describe and analyze limited aspects of discourse. Facing these limitations, scholars in argumentation theory have moved to explore pragmatics and theoretically interact with it. Similarly, the analysis of discourse inescapably faces the reconstruction and assessment of implicit messages. Pragmatics can offer a method of analysis, or a theoretical background for developing new analytical proposals.

In this framework, the theoretical developments aiming at discovering and proposing new dialogues between related fields of study are crucially important. Walton’s paper focuses on a crucial topic for the two domains of pragmatics and argumentation theory, relevance. In argumentation, relevance has been always analyzed and described in terms of probative relevance. Probative relevance is the capacity of an argument to support another to make it stronger or to attack the other by casting doubt on it or even to discredit it as worthless. However, in “[Assessing Dialectical Relevance Using Argument Distance](#)” Walton shows how this concept is vague and at the same time problematic, unless defined more precisely considering other conditions, such as inferential distance – defined as the number (quantity) and acceptability (quality) of the argumentative inferences needed for connecting a premise to a conclusion. The modeling of inferential systems with a formal model of argument, Carneades Argumentation System, allows determining when an argument is relevant and when it is poorly relevant or irrelevant.

Pragmatics becomes in “[The Communicative Functions of Metaphors Between Explanation and Persuasion](#)” the framework that allows using argumentation theory for analyzing medical discourse, and more specifically the uses of metaphors in medical consultations. Argumentation (persuasion) and explanation are considered in the literature the two prototypical uses of metaphors. However, the definition of explanation and its distinction from persuasion is problematic, both at a theoretical and at an empirical level. Considering the most accepted definition of explanation as a transfer of understanding, they observe that in medical discourse, metaphorical explanations are very frequently used to persuade the interlocutor. But this is not their only function, as through many examples the authors show how other dialogical

goals can be pursued through them. Metaphorical utterances thus provide a theoretical challenge, that they address by drawing on the notion of dialogue move developed in argumentation theory, and distinguishing between the cognitive level of understanding (and the transfer thereof) from the pragmatic/dialogical ones.

The pragmatic dimension of argumentation is explored in “[Stereotypes Favour Implicatures and Implicatures Smuggle Stereotypes: The Case of Propaganda](#)” from a cognitive perspective, focusing on the role of stereotypes and the tacit communication thereof in persuasive messages. As Lombardi Vallauri points out, the literature has clearly underscored the crucial effects that the implicit mechanisms of meaning conveyance such as presuppositions and implicatures have on the addressees’ attention on the content. This cognitive effect of implicitness can be used for persuasive and manipulative purposes. Through an analysis of advertising texts and political propaganda, this last essay shows how implicatures and stereotypes are frequently combined in persuasive messages. This combination is explained as a twofold interaction: a stereotype can be more easily inferred than less accepted (and acceptable) information, while stereotypes can be more easily accepted when they are communicated implicitly.

The ideas proposed and defended in these twelve chapters offer an overview not only of the theoretical topics in pragmatics, but also of some new directions and methods of inquiry.

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