

Introduction. Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Texts

What we observe is not nature itself, but nature exposed to our method of questioning.
Werner Heisenberg, *Physics and Philosophy*

1. The Ways of Pragmatics

Though relatively young as a field of research – fully developed only around the late 1970s² – Pragmatics has exponentially grown in the past decades. If the primigenial focus of the discipline is universally recognized as ‘language in use’, intended as the examination of the speakers’ concrete linguistic choices in specific situations and contexts, it is also true that in the 2010s Pragmatics finds itself to be a more inclusive field of research, open to the solicitations coming from other branches of Linguistics (Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Historical Linguistics, Stylistics, to mention but a few), or from perspectives borrowed from Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Cognitive and Cultural Studies.

One decisive factor favouring this gradual opening has been the influence exerted by the so-called ‘discursive (or post-modern) turn’ on the traditional line of pragmatic studies. In the first days Pragmatics emerged as:

a field of linguistic inquiry [...] initiated in the 1930s by Morris, Carnap, and Peirce, for whom syntax addressed the formal relations of signs to one another, semantics the relation of signs to what they denote, and pragmatics the relation of signs to their users and interpreters. In this program, pragmatics is the study of those context-dependent aspects of meaning which are systematically abstracted away from in the construction of context or logical form.³

Subsequent developments – in the wake of Austin and Grice⁴ – traced further trajectories that detected and scrutinized the *performative* and *inferential* nature of language, capable of releasing meanings from the friction between intention and saying, between semantics and its possible contextual distortions.

With the spread of poststructuralism, the notion of performativity (be it linguistic or not) invaded any field of knowledge and became the pillar of the deconstruction that thinkers such as Derrida, Kristeva, Foucault, and Lacan, enacted against some assumptions of Western culture. Drawing on a philosophical reading of Saussure’s concept of language as a differential and self-referential system, poststructuralism definitely debunked the idea that culture pre-exists language and that language is a neutral means of the representation of reality. On the contrary, language was exposed as radically

¹ Bianca Del Villano contributed to the “Introduction”, writing section one, “The ways of Pragmatics”; Urszula Kizelbach contributed to the “Introduction”, writing section two, “Pragmatics, Aesthetics and the Texts”.

² Andreas Jucker and Irma Taavitsainen, *English Historical Pragmatics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 2; Jacob Mey, “Pragmatics”, in Jacob Mey, ed., *Concise Encyclopaedia of Pragmatics* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1998), 716-737.

³ Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, “Introduction”, in Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward, ed., *The Handbook of Pragmatics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), xi.

⁴ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge: Harvard U. P., [1955] 1962); H. P. Grice, “Logic and conversation” (1967), in P. Cole and J. Morgan, eds., *Syntax and Semantics III: Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 41-58.

active (performative) in the construction of the world, a mechanism deeply interwoven in the architecture of the human mind/psyche and of the sign-system characterizing a given society. It was in particular the work of Michel Foucault that inaugurated the acceptance of ‘discourse’ as used today, intended as the net of forces at play in the reception and production of meaning in a given historical moment and in a given place. From Foucault on, meaning, language and signs started being conceived as interactively connected with social practices, with the rules governing communities, with the technologies of power and knowledge historically situated.

Expectedly, Pragmatics, the field of study that had contributed so much to the evolution of the concept of performativity – *how to do things with words* – developed lines of research further exploring this direction. What dramatically changed in the aftermath of the postmodern turn was not the core of Austin and Grice’s perspectives, but the idea that the context is presumptive, a given element out of which only meaning arises as something new.⁵ Duranti and Goodwin give a perfect definition of how context was rethought on the ground of discursive studies: “Instead of viewing context as a set of variables that statistically surround strips of talk, context and talk are now argued to stand in a mutually reflexive relationship to each other, with talk, and the interpretive work it generates, shaping context as much as context shapes talk”.⁶ Thus, whilst the traditional trend considered Pragmatics as a “component, or even a level, in a linguistic theory”, needful of an analytical normative approach able “to make generalizations that hold across all such instances in use”,⁷ the discursive trend inaugurated a “data-driven or empirical view of pragmatic actions”, whereby “pragmaticians work alongside conversation analysts, discourse analysts, sociolinguists, (linguistic) anthropologists and other researchers”.⁸ More importantly, the latter started working not only on utterances – the “pragmatic equivalent of the syntactic unit of a sentence” – but on “discourses as units of study”.⁹ The result was a detour of the logico-semantic trend characterized by a rationalistic view of language and the development of a vision according to which the context is concurrently emergent along with meaning, an element that needs to be examined through the recourse to an interdisciplinary approach.¹⁰

Since the 1990s, Pragmatics has mainly but not exclusively worked in this direction, promoting numerous lines of inquiry based on the dialogue with other disciplines. Among these lines, particularly fruitful have been those exploring the interactive meaning/context dynamics in terms of an expansion of the latter, so that it could account on the one hand for “virtually unlimited social realit[ies]”, and on the other for “internal phenomen[a] or mental construct[s]”.¹¹ The interface between Pragmatics and Sociology, Anthropology, and Discourse Analysis, has in fact produced important results in the investigation of the interplay between norms, discourses and practices. Parallel to the concern with the centrality of language in the social reality has been the interest in the cognitive aspects implied in the production and reception/interpretation of language, an aspect that strongly contributed to moving the focus of the pragmatic analysis towards the role played by hearers rather than speakers. It would be

⁵ I adopt here the terminology used by Dan Archer and Peter Grundy. “Introduction”, in Dan Archer and Peter Grundy, eds., *The Pragmatic Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 3.

⁶ Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, “Rethinking Context: An Introduction”, in Alessandro Duranti and Charles Goodwin, eds., *Rethinking Context. Language as an Interactive Phenomenon* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1992), 31.

⁷ Archer and Grundy, “Introduction”, 3.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kasia M. Jaszczolt and Keith Allan, “Introduction. Pragmatic objects and pragmatic method”, in Keith Allan and Kasia M. Jaszczolt, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of Pragmatics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2012), 1, emphasis added.

¹⁰ It is important to emphasise that the rationalistic and the discursive perspectives are not mutually exclusive; nor has the latter completely replaced the former. Though they represent two waves belonging to different times – the first has developed since the 1970s and the second since the 1990s – they are also relatable respectively to the Anglo-American and to the continental European areas of study.

¹¹ Archer and Grundy, “Introduction”, 3.

impossible to reconstruct the richness and variety of these two complementary fields and their single components; what may be useful, on the contrary, is once again to emphasize how they have virtually designed a triangle in which subjects (speakers and hearers), language and culture (society and discourses) prove inextricably connected.

A missing element in this triangle – the text – has been provided by other sub-fields, among which particularly significant has proved Historical Pragmatics (born around the 1990s), whose contribution to the development of general Pragmatics has gone beyond the many implications and overtones of linguistic variation in diachrony.

The efforts made to legitimize the pragmatic analysis of written texts – whereas it was impossible to recover the natural language of periods antecedent to the advent of recording technologies¹² – have resulted in the refinement of specific methodologies applicable to artificial linguistic testimonies of past epochs. More importantly, the descriptive analysis of markers related to genre and other types of textual codifications,¹³ combining with synchronic and normative studies on genre and with stylistic investigations over formal aspects of fictional texts,¹⁴ has fuelled the production of a thick critical debate that, overtly or not, has led to consider any kind of codified text as a larger pragmatic unit of discourse, as a speech act or a communicative event in the right to be pragmatically studied as such.

2. Pragmatics, Aesthetics and the Texts

Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Texts attempts to open a debate on all the pragmatic aspects so far discussed, according to a logic that aims to integrate the rationalistic and the discursive approaches. The volume offers for the first time – as far as we know – a perspective that interrogates textuality in relation to its aesthetic dimension. By ‘aesthetic’ we mean the formal organization of a fictional or non-fictional text, together with the set of specific cultural or aesthetic values and stylistic devices displayed by various textual genres, which can be subject to thorough pragmatic analysis.

The articles collected in this volume attempt to address the following problems and questions: Can all texts be analysed pragmatically? Does the genre of a given text with its constraints and/or possibilities force the use of a specific pragmatic theory? How does the text’s aesthetics influence the pragmatic/stylistic analysis and the results the analyst is left with? What is the role of the social context and genre in the pragmatic analysis of communication within the text?

Given the complexity of these kinds of interrogations, Authors have exceptionally written very long contributions that could do justice to the complexity of the methodological frames applied to the texts. The volume is thematically organized in sections that clarify the nature and typology of the texts analyzed.

In Part One, *Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Genres and Visual Arts*, we present Maria Grazia Guido’s contribution “A Possible-Worlds Approach to the Pragmatic Analysis of Metaphysical Imaging across Genres and Art Forms”. Guido’s article is an ambitious attempt at interpreting metaphysical texts using the notion of possible worlds by combining cognitive-experiential linguistics

¹² On this aspect, see Andreas Jucker, “Historical Pragmatics”, in K. Brown, ed., *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (Oxford: Elsevier, 2006), 329-332; Jonathan Culpeper and Merja Kytö, *Early Modern English Dialogues. Spoken Interaction as Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 2010).

¹³ Irma Taavitsainen’s historical pragmatic research has been fundamental in this respect. See in particular “Genre Dynamics in the History of English”, in Merja Kytö and Päivi Pahta, eds., *The Cambridge Handbook of English Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2016); “Changing Conventions of Writing: The Dynamics of Genres, Text Types, and Text Traditions”, *European Journal of English Studies. Special Issue: Early Modern English Text Types*. 5/2, 2001, 139-150; “Genres and Text Types in Medieval and Renaissance English”, *Poetica*, 47, 1997, 49-62.

¹⁴ See Janet Giltrow, “The Pragmatics of the Genres of Fiction”, in Miriam A. Locher and Andreas H. Jucker, eds., *Pragmatics of Fiction* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 55-91.

and possible world semantics. In an endeavour to find an interface between philosophy and logic, as well as pragmatics and literature, she embarks on yet another discipline, the fine arts, in her philosophical and linguistic analysis of Dali's paintings. She discusses various literary genres (Metaphysical poetry, Imagist poetry), utilizes relevant linguistic theories (Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor), and establishes a new link between the possible world construct in logic and the pragmatic analytical tool of cooperative maxims to emphasize the performative (pragmatic) nature of metaphysical discourse. Guido argues that in the process of 'imaging', readers of metaphysical texts discover new image archetypes, which are drawn from their primary-logic experience of the world and the exploration of displacement as part of human conceptualization. The article puts forward the idea that the interaction between the readers' cognitive and physical experience can give rise to novel interpretations of metaphysical discourse.

Part Two of the volume titled *Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Special Purpose Languages* begins with Annarita Taronna's article "Aesthetic Conventions and Pragmalinguistic Devices in Computer-mediated Communication. Q&A Websites as a Case Study". Taronna in her analysis of digital communication tries to show that the influence of Q&A websites on their users' purchasing decisions relies heavily on the participants' pragmatic competence and their recognition of some powerful pragmalinguistic devices used by addressers and addressees (e.g. clear questions can cause users to be more willing to help). She looks at popular Q&A websites (e.g. Yahoo! Answers) and their narrative architecture, which is characterized by 'nowness' and 'recency', and employs the notion of the Community of Practice to analyse various communicative strategies used in computer-mediated communication in a specialized domain (golf). She discusses the role of English as the Lingua Franca of global Q&A websites and demonstrates how EFL in Q&A interactions can be used to determine the potential benefits of the membership in a digital brand community. Finally, Taronna talks about the emotional aesthetics of Q&A websites. She uses sentiment analysis to show how the participants associate emotions and opinions with certain linguistic aspects, e.g. how personal pronouns and adjectives can decide on the success of questions and answers, or how modal verbs can be used to express politeness and proximity, and how they can create the sense of solidarity among the users discussing the same topic.

Esterino Adami's "Pragmatics and the Aesthetics of Food Discourse" is a stylistic analysis of Jamie Oliver's cookery book *Jamie's Italy* (2005). Adami calls it a 'hybrid' genre, as it combines traditional Italian recipes with landscape photos and the personal comments of the author. His qualitative analysis of linguistic examples continues the scholarly trend of analyzing food discourse in TV cookery shows (see Matwick and Matwick 2014),¹⁵ and in particular, in celebrity chef cookery books (see Johnston, Rodney and Chong 2014).¹⁶ Pointing at various stylistic devices in recipes and at paratextual features in the book, Adami claims that Oliver's choice of certain linguistic expressions reinforces the reader's 'schema' of what is the 'authentic' Italian foodscape. Also, he looks at how metonymy (e.g. 'treviso is the Aston Martin of the radicchio family') and Italian loanwords (e.g. 'antipasti', 'al dente') add sophistication to Oliver's food description, or how rhetorical questions and figurative language in general can express the emotional involvement of the speaker. Adami uses stylistics to characterise the Italian cuisine from a stereotypical perspective; for example, he demonstrates how Oliver's use of social deixis underlines the speaker's stereotypical view of the Italians (e.g. 'mamma' to refer to 'mother').

¹⁵ Keri Matwick and Kelsi Matwick, "Storytelling and Synthetic Personalization in Television Cooking Shows", *Journal of Pragmatics*, 71 (2014), 151-159.

¹⁶ Josée Johnston, Alexandra Rodney and Philippa Chong, "Making Change in the Kitchen? A Study of Celebrity Cookbooks, Culinary Personas, and Inequality", *Poetics*, 47 (2014), 1-22.

In Part Three, *Pragmatics and Fiction*, we present Janet Giltrow's article "Relevance Theory for Fiction". Giltrow questions the validity of RT as an analytical tool to describe literature. She argues that much as RT has been applied to fields outside literature (e.g. linguistics, psychology, philosophy), it does not function as an 'engine of interpretation' or evaluation of literary texts. Relevance Theory, she says, depends on invented examples/scripts from more specialist genres connected to the social formation, and works better with non-literary (e.g. workplace, household) contexts. The analyst's application of intention towards literary texts within the RT framework can be risky, because the way of reasoning, inferencing, or understanding intention within RT clashes with our reasoning about the aesthetic. Giltrow's article postulates that Relevance Theory may shed an interesting new light on specialist literary interpretation and can be applied further to aesthetic or journalistic genres, but not as a hermeneutical tool used in the field of literature and literary studies, since its reasoning is too far away from the aesthetic values present in literary texts.

Michael Ingham in his contribution "'In a Double Sense": Syntactic Ambiguity and the Pragmatics of Equivocation in Shakespearean Dramatic Dialogue" investigates the pragmatics of Shakespeare's dialogue and demonstrates how syntax can influence the semantics of the play-texts. In particular, he shows how ambiguous syntactic constructions are situated in scenes and how they create the feeling of uncertainty in the reader. Moreover, he points at numerous links between the syntactic features of the dialogue and characterisation, i.e. he shows how syntactic complexity can reflect the moral ambivalence of the character, or the whole scene. He claims that the characters' bending or violating the rules of grammar and syntax (e.g. Gricean Cooperative Principle) enhances dramatic plot, and he compares Shakespeare's violation of the maxims of conversation to Wittgenstein's ideas on 'language games'. Using examples from various plays by Shakespeare, Ingham shows how the sentential complexity of embedded clauses at different levels of subordination contributes to the textual ambiguity and, eventually, to the ambiguous nature of dramatic interactions in some scenes, or how the liberal use of Verb-Subject and Object-Verb word order in declarative sentences creates the syntactic intricacy of dramatic dialogue.

Sabrina Francesconi's article "'Blue-black caves of shade": The Language of Colour in Juliet's Trilogy by Munro" serves as a practical framework for the quantitative and qualitative analysis of colour terms in fiction. Her socio-semiotic analysis of the language of colour in three stories from Alice Munro's collection *Runaway* (2004) is a further contribution to the studies on the discourse of colour (Berlin and Kay 1969; van Leeuwen 2011),¹⁷ and by examining the symbolic meaning of colours in stylistic terms, she demonstrates how Munro uses colours to express indeterminacy in the stories. She discusses how certain parametric systems connected with colours, for example value or saturation, are verbally articulated via chromisms, compounds, or adjectives, and tries to establish which parameters reflect Munro's ideas most effectively. Francesconi examines colours' metafunctional role on examples and shows how colours are used to describe the characters or space in the stories (ideational function), or how colours generate emotions and what impact they have on the interpersonal relations within the narrative. By combining psychological and discursive methods of analysis, she puts a fresh, practical and valuable perspective on the study of colour terms in fictional texts.

John Douthwaite's article "Natural Complexity" is a stylistic analysis of an extract from the novel by Agatha Christie *Murder on the Orient Express*. Douthwaite, actually, combines stylistics with pragmatics, as in his study of the novel he looks at how relevant to the reader's understanding a given piece of information given by the author can be. He claims that many of Christie's lexical choices in the narrative are not accidental, and he shows how a single lexeme can lead to obvious inferences by

¹⁷ Brent Berlin and Paul Kay, *Basic Colour Terms: Their Universality and Evolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); Theo van Leeuwen, *The Language of Colour* (London: Routledge, 2011).

the reader. The author's 'motivated' linguistic choices matter especially in the genre of a crime story: they create specific effects by furnishing the reader's brain with insufficient information, they provoke the reader's inferences and activate their schemata, and finally they are used for expressing non-literal meanings. Douthwaite's analysis demonstrates that in the realm of fiction pragmatics (Speech Act Theory, Gricean maxims) cannot work on its own, and that the stylistic features of the text trigger the more complex processes of understanding, which help the reader better interpret the story. Douthwaite argues that much as Christie's crime stories may be perceived as simple and uncomplicated, her use of plethora of stylistic devices creates a lot of potential for the multifaceted meanings, and thus, opens up the space for the reader's complex ways of reasoning and inferencing.

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