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Defining pragmatics (DP) is a survey and evaluation of definitions of pragmatics. Ariel rejects all except a contrast between grammar/code and inference/pragmatics: ‘it’s a grammatical code if it correlates between some linguistic expression and some meaning or use in a conventional manner. It is pragmatic if the correlation between the form and the meaning or use is mediated by some inference’ (19). This implies that pragmatics is nonconventional—a peculiar interpretation if one accepts the definition of convention in Lewis 1969. A writes, ‘the goal of a grammar/pragmatics division of labor is to distinguish two types of explanations for linguistic utterances, not to argue for their absolute psycholinguistic separation under all circumstances’ (110). DP does not succeed in distinguishing grammar as code from pragmatics as inference, partly because, as A admits, ‘[m]ost, if not all language use involves both grammatical and pragmatic aspects’ (144; see also p. 19).

DP consists of nine chapters. An introductory chapter, ‘What’s under the big-tent pragmatics?’, answers the title question as follows: ‘anything relating to discourse and communication (exclusive of pure language structure)’ (11). A distinguishes PROBLEM SOLVERS from BORDER SEEKERS. The former focus on problems that had no solutions according to extant formal grammars; A lists Charles Fillmore, Georgia Green, Jeanette Gundel, Susumu Kuno, George Lakoff, Robin Lakoff, Ellen Prince, Jerrold Sadock, and Sandra Thompson, for whom ‘every aspect of the communicated message is somehow coded’ (7). Border seekers typically distinguish between coded ‘what is said’ and inferred/implicated ‘what is meant’, applying Gricean theory to rework problems of syntax and semantics. A names Laurence Horn, Gerald Gazdar, Stephen C. Levinson, Robyn Carston, and those who contributed to Cole 1981—which, confusedly and confusingly, includes problem solvers Fillmore, Green, Prince, and Sadock!

There are an additional three parts to DP. Part 1 (Chs. 2 and 3) deconstructs pragmatics, Part 2 (Chs. 3 and 4) reconstitutes pragmatics, and Part 3 (Chs. 5–9) maps the ‘big tent’. Part 1 finds that the many definitions of pragmatics render it incoherent. Ch. 2, ‘Surveying multiple-criterion definitions for pragmatics’ (24–34), describes pragmatic meaning as contextually dependent. Semantics is said to be abstract, literal/explicit, and truth-conditional; pragmatics is contextually conditioned and non-truth-conditional, and it accounts for nonliteral and implicit meanings. There is passing reference to the non-truth-conditionality of speech-act types such as questions, imperatives, and expressives, which A inaccurately stipulates thereby to be wholly pragmatic (see Searle 1969, Bach & Harnish 1979, Allan 2006). The much disputed meanings of and versus logical conjunction are assigned to pragmatics via implication. Politeness effects, hedging, and discourse larger than a sentence are assigned to pragmatics (but the problem of what constitutes a sentence is not broached, so Harry fell asleep and he dreamed of Hermione would be dealt with nonpragmatically, whereas Harry fell asleep. He dreamed of Hermione must be accounted for pragmatically). The Hebrew mi she nominalizer is restricted in application to VIPs, which is grammatical knowledge (234); its proper use, however, is pragmatically determined (41, 234). Surely, this is true of most language expressions.

A toys with the possibility that grammar is a product of the left hemisphere of the brain, and pragmatics a product of the right hemisphere (47–48). Later, she demonstrates that the reality is more complicated (83–86). In her view, codes are quickly and automatically accessed and determine, while pragmatic inference is slower because the meaning is contextually modulated; but Recanati (2004) and Jaszczolt (2005) have claimed that many inferences are also automatic. Violations to grammar are unacceptable but violations to pragmatic expectations are acceptable if reasonable explication can be given. ‘Inferred meanings are implicit, nonconventional and therefore cancelable’ (52). Were inferred meanings not conventional, how would language users so readily understand one another? Each speaker would be like Humpty Dumpty. For A, ‘conventional’ simply means coded/grammatical. The only criterion A provides for distinguishing code from inference is ‘the wise-guy test’: only encoded meanings can be forced by an uncooperative interlocutor when the context makes it clear this is unreasonable (240).

Ch. 3, ‘Problematizing the criteria’, shows that supposedly pragmatic phenomena manifest grammatical behavior, and supposedly grammatical phenomena manifest pragmatic behavior
First is the widely accepted argument that, unlike conversational implicature, conventional implicature is not pragmatic. Later, A argues that despite not being defeasible, conventional implicatures are pragmatic because they are non-truth-conditional (a controversial point because they clearly contribute to truth conditions): ‘conventional implicatures are rather like semantic meanings’—this was suggested in Lyons 1995:276 and demonstrated in Allan 2001:188–91. Second, A restates the widely accepted view that indexicals have both semantic and pragmatic aspects. Third, number and gender marking interact with both grammar and pragmatics in many languages. Fourth, if *and* is a semantically logical conjunction, then either 1 is contradictory (which it is not) or conversational implicature affects truth conditions.

(1) It is preferable to get married and fall pregnant than to fall pregnant and get married.

Fifth, pragmatics applies below clause level (e.g. at lexical level (248); see also Allan 2012) as well as above sentence level. Furthermore, extrasentential dependency may be grammatically marked. To suggest that semantics is context-independent ignores what you find in a dictionary. For instance, compare the meanings of *shoe* in (2a,b).

(2) a. Her shoe was uncomfortable, the heel was too high.
   b. The shoe is nailed to the horse’s foot.

Many semantic facts seem to be pragmatically motivated (e.g. the meaning extensions of *back*, *head*, *neck*) and many pragmatic phenomena are conventional: this is surely true for scalar implicatures (e.g. generally, *three* means ‘at most three’).

[S]ome meanings, while pragmatic in that they connect utterances to their contexts, are conventional codes rather than inferences, and hence, belong in the grammar [e.g. Hebrew *harey*, English *bunny*]. Also some truth-conditional meanings (hence, grammatical) are inferred rather than coded (and should be classified as pragmatic) [e.g. *I*]. Last, some coded meanings seem to be defeasible anyway (and hence pragmatic) [e.g. irony, inappropriate senses of ambiguous terms].

Then on p. 101 A writes, ‘coded meanings are not cancelable’, which contradicts this. These statements strongly suggest that A is forcing her classification onto language data to preserve her hypothesis without consideration for the value of her analysis: what linguistic insight is gained by her Jesuitical maneuver? None that I can see. A preferable approach is the squishy one she quotes (88) from Leech 1983:29f., 47: ‘Grammar is primarily conventional and secondarily motivated; pragmatics is primarily motivated and secondarily conventional. … Grammatical explanations are primarily formal; pragmatic explanations are primarily functional’. Nonetheless, A steadfastly rejects the conclusion that ‘grammar and pragmatics cannot be coherently defined as distinct complementary concepts’ (89).

Part 2 opens with Ch. 4 defending ‘Grammar as code, pragmatics as inference’. This begins with an objection to the ‘list of canonized pragmatic topics’ (94–97): anaphora, conversational implicature, conversational interaction/structure, definiteness, deixis/indexicals, nonliteral language, politeness, presupposition, reference, and speech acts. The topics in such lists are not exclusively pragmatic and the list varies from scholar to scholar. A admits that codes often provide only rudimentary meanings that must be enriched by inferencing (101). The example she gives is the indexical *we*, but as shown in 2, it is generally true; and examples can be multiplied ad lib: ‘[D]oing pragmatics requires argumentation as to what is best analyzed as a code and what as inference’ (119). Decoding comes first and the inferred meanings determined. All possible decoded meanings are accessed and then irrelevant ones suppressed (David Swinney, Morton Germbsbacher, Rachel Giora). A writes: ‘Grammatical phenomena are … sometimes nontruth conditional, implicit, discoursal, etc., (against the stereotype of what a grammatical phenomenon ought to be), and extragrammatical (pragmatic) phenomena are sometimes truth conditional, sentential, and even relatively explicit (again, contra the stereotypical pragmatic phenomenon)’ (118). The squishy border between grammar and pragmatics continues to be uncovered throughout the remainder of DP.

Ch. 5, ‘Inferential pragmatic theories’, critically examines Grice 1975, neo-Grice (Horn 1984, Levinson 2000), and relevance theory with respect to the way they distinguish grammar as a set
of codes from pragmatics as a set of inferences (120). ‘Various inferential enrichments are virtually always required, for linguistic codes are never determinate enough to yield a proposition which is fully truth conditional’ (142). The chapter contains nothing new.

Part 3, ‘Mapping the big tent’, demonstrates that ‘virtually all so-called pragmatic uses/interpretations are sometimes determined by code and sometimes by inference. Most often a combination of the two procedures is required’ (146; see also p. 210). Ch. 6, ‘The canon’, demonstrates ‘the futility of the topical approach to pragmatics’ by reexamining the classical topics of pragmatics in the light of the code/inference division. Once again, there is no new insight.

Ch. 7, ‘Functional syntax’, mistakes the functionalist claim that there is a functional motivation for syntax for the claim that syntax is pragmatic. Parts of it, such as a discussion of subject-auxiliary inversion in English (203–5) seem more appropriate to Ariel 2008 than to the definition of pragmatics.

Ch. 8, ‘Beyond pragmatics’, is ‘devoted to linguistic regularities which are clearly motivated by sociocultural and psycholinguistic factors’ (213), such as politeness, stance, interactional patterns, sociolinguistic variation, and salience. Once again, A identifies the codependence of grammar and pragmatics; for example, lexical items may encode respect, but their use may require inferential interpretation. Similarly, stance may be encoded, or, more commonly, it may be inferred.

In the concluding Ch. 9, ‘Many questions, some resolutions’, A reiterates her thesis: grammar is ‘governed by conventions associating specific linguistic expressions with specific meanings and/or use conditions, and pragmatic[s] … by context-sensitive inferencing applied to the interpreted linguistic string’ (233, A’s emphasis). Yet there is the same equivocation: ‘There are hardly any purely pragmatic or purely grammatical topics’ (232), and some topics may be interpreted either as grammatical or pragmatic (233). The pragmatic basis for grammar is admitted in various places (242, 243, 247, 273).

Ariel is a well-respected scholar who has done much interesting work, but DP is a disappointment. I doubt there is anything new in it for her peers, and I would hesitate to recommend it to students, because, although DP does comprehensively survey the field of pragmatics, it also charges that ‘pragmatics does not stand for a coherent set of issues’—‘the field is fragmented’ (18). Furthermore, despite claiming ‘there simply is no “grand design” … behind grammar and behind pragmatics’ (242), A attempts but fails to impose her own grand design to differentiate grammar as code from pragmatics as inference. Surely it should not be surprising that linguistic categories (like linguistic theories) are stipulated by researchers and not to be found in nature/human language (see Einstein 1936, Allan 2003).

REFERENCES


Reviewed by JOHN BAUGH, Washington University in St. Louis

Bay City High School is the locus for Mary Bucholtz’s careful and insightful ethnolinguistic studies of white teens who attend a multiracial school near San Francisco, California. American racial ideologies are central to this magnificent book. B draws upon experiences in Texas, where her professorial career began in College Station at Texas A&M University, and California, where she studied and conducted fieldwork at Bay City High (a pseudonym).

Although this book will hold great appeal for scholars in anthropology, sociology, education, urban studies, and ethnic studies, linguists will gain tremendously from B’s meticulous research. Consistent with the tradition of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), transcription conventions are provided at the outset that are crucial to the depiction of intonation, pauses, and other tonal qualities that enrich each transcription and its interpretation. Phonetic representations of vowels, diphthongs, consonants, and diacritic symbols precede Ch. 1, ‘White styles: Language, race, and youth identities’.

The complexity of this thesis is established at the outset. B briefly mentions that Bay City High School is ‘a large, multiracial urban public school in the San Francisco Bay Area’ (1), before introducing ‘Damien’, a white male teen whose ‘speech was influenced by African American Vernacular English’ (1). At Bay City High, language usage, perceptions of race, and matters of personal identity collide in diverse ways. Moreover, B observes that these youth identities are not merely psychological outcomes; they are the result of ‘social practice and social interaction’ (1).

Building directly on the previous work of Bucholtz & Hall 2005, this book ‘is rooted in an understanding of identity as the social positioning of self and other’ (2). The text also concentrates on European American students, based on ‘the specific historical, cultural, and geographic context’ (3) in which the research was conducted. Moreover, ‘the experience of white students at Bay City High in the mid-1990’s was part of a much larger ethnoracial shift’ (3) throughout the United States.

Readers who are already familiar with Eckert’s (1989) Jocks and burnouts will find a combination of similarities and noteworthy differences regarding the evolution of white teen identity. Eckert took great care to disassociate from the school, whereas B collaborated directly with a teacher who introduced her as an ethnographic researcher; moreover, because of this direct collaboration with a highly cooperative teacher, students were encouraged to speak with B in direct