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The Foundations of Pragmatics and Its Relationship with Linguistic Research

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Abstract:

This study examines the origins and intellectual foundations of pragmatics as an extension of a long-standing scholarly tradition, within which attempts to approximate and interpret texts predate its formal emergence. Pragmatics has since flourished among both Arab and Western scholars. This has prompted us to explore its rich sources while simultaneously addressing its relationship with other linguistic disciplines, such as semantics and linguistics, more broadly. Through this endeavour, we aim to assist the researcher in identifying a clear, accessible path to effective, persuasive, and meaningful communication.

Keywords: Pragmatics; foundations; communication; language; linguistics.

Introduction:

Neither ancient nor modern sciences, whether Arab or Western, emerged all at once with their principles, foundations, and fields; rather, they developed through successive stages until they reached their present state of maturity and completeness. Pragmatics traces back to early precursory developments that serve as its initial roots and formative stages. Numerous linguistic and critical studies and approaches preceded pragmatics, analysing literary texts from formal linguistic perspectives. Among these approaches are structuralism and the formalist approach, both of which are grounded in linguistics. These studies aimed to bring literary texts closer to scientific and objective analysis.

Even though structuralism was intellectually grounded in a background that held an appeal for its completeness, modern critics have demonstrated its failure to illuminate the text, to establish it, and to realise its meaning.

These studies contributed to the emergence of a new scientific field, namely, pragmatics, which is composed of multiple disciplines. What, then, are the foundations of pragmatics, and what is its relationship with linguistic research?

1. The Term “Pragmatics”

The term “pragmatics,” in its Arabic origin, derives from the linguistic root (d-w-l), which has various meanings, all revolving around notions of transformation and change. In *Asās al-Balāghah* by al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538 AH), it is stated that “dāla: the state turned in his favour; the days alternated; God granted victory to such-and-such people over their enemy, making predominance theirs over him ... the believers were granted ascendancy over the polytheists at the Battle of Badr, and the polytheists were granted ascendancy over the Muslims at the Battle of Uḥud ... and God alternates the days among people, at times for them and at times against them ... they alternated the matter among themselves; the walker alternates between his feet, shifting between them”.

In *Lisān al-‘Arab* by Ibn Manẓūr, it is stated that “we alternated the matter, meaning we took turns; they say ‘dawālayka’, meaning alternation in the matter ... the days alternated, meaning they revolved; God alternates them among people; hands alternated it, meaning one took it at one time and another at another time; we alternated the work and the matter among ourselves, meaning we took turns in it, so that one performed it at one time”.

Arabic lexicons do not depart from treating the root “d-w-l” as meaning transformation, change, and transfer, whether from one place to another or from one state to another. This entails the presence of more than one party participating in the act of

transformation, change, alternation, and transmission. "Such is the nature of language: it transforms from one state with the speaker to another with the listener, and it circulates among people as they exchange it among themselves. Hence, the term "pragmatics" is more firmly established in conveying this meaning than other terms such as instrumental, utilitarian, or contextual.

The roots of the study of communication may be traced back to the theoretical works of al-Jāhiz, Abū Hilāl al-ʿAskarī, Ibn Qutaybah, Hāzīm al-Qartājannī, and others. However, these studies were concerned with the effect produced directly by the message and the conditions that render discourse successful. Here, the features of modern pragmatics begin to emerge, with these theorists focusing on the sender, the receiver, the message, the process of influence and being influenced, intention, the speaker's purposes, and the benefit derived from speech. These elements likewise constitute the essence of pragmatic theory. Some modern scholars maintain that modern pragmatics emerged after al-Jāhiz, particularly in his book *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn*, in which he focused on the process of influencing and persuading the receiver. In his view, this theory is known as the "theory of influence and context".

From this perspective, it may be asserted that the roots of pragmatics are manifested in al-Jāhiz's division of *bayān* into three functions, namely:

- the informative function
- the cognitive-educational function
- the persuasive function
- the argumentative function

He devoted particular attention to the persuasive function, which represents a significant aspect of modern pragmatics, primarily concerned with communication, persuasion, influence, the conveyance of meaning, and the provision of benefit.

Al-Jāhiz defines language as follows: "an instrument through which eloquent expression is manifested; an outwards form by which the inner self is disclosed; an admonisher that forbids what is reprehensible; an embellisher that calls to what is good; a cultivator that sows affection; a harvester that uproots rancour; and an inspirer that harmonises the ears".

Al-Jāhiz is primarily concerned with the notion of appropriateness to context, focusing on the various elements of communication, namely, the speaker, the addressee, and the text. Eloquent expression, in turn, branches into multiple contexts that may be inferred from the definition itself. Insofar as language is an outwards form expressing the inner self, a speaker, and an intercessor, this falls within the social context; as a witness, it may be classified within the historical context; as a judge and describer, it indicates the textual context; and finally, as a consoler, companion, and admonisher, it pertains to the psychological context.

Notably, al-Jāhiz's primary aim is to realise the process of communication and transmission, which constitutes the principal framework of the linguistic process. For him, meaning is not fixed in a single state, and speech is not determinate except within a particular context. This finding demonstrates the importance of context in the semantic process.

In the Western tradition, the earliest definition of pragmatics was provided by Charles Morris in 1938, who defined it as "the study of the relation between signs and their users". This definition encompasses both linguistics and semiotics and extends beyond the human domain to include the animal and the mechanical.

Jacques Moeschler and Anne Reboul linked the concept of pragmatics to linguistics. In *The Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Pragmatics*, it is defined as "the study of language use, as opposed to the study of the linguistic system, which is the particular concern of linguistics".

What may be observed from the two preceding definitions is that pragmatics is concerned with the study of speech or language use, in contrast to earlier studies, which divided language into *langue* and *parole* and focused on the study of *langue* in pursuit of scientific objectivity, thereby excluding speech from their scope of analysis because it is individual and difficult to regulate in its mechanisms. Philippe Blanchet states, "Directing analysis towards speech is not merely the study of 'speech' in the Saussurean sense; rather, it is in fact the study of language in its entirety, including speech".

Pragmatics thus denotes the study of language use in various contexts and real-life situations, that is, its practical circulation. Ferdinand Hallin seeks to delimit the concept of pragmatics by stating, "Let us call into question Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and suppose that pragmatics cannot be the object of a systematic study; pragmatics aims to formulate a theory of speech acts, that is, abstract models or categories applicable to the concrete and individual behaviours we perform when we speak".

With respect to Marie Diller and François Recanat, they propose another definition, according to which pragmatics is "the study of language use in discourse, as evidenced by its discursive competence".

Pragmatics thus seeks to uncover the communicative competence that linguistic utterances exhibit to study the meaning of language in use.

2. The Foundations of Pragmatics:

Pragmatics is characterised by the multiplicity of its sources and resources, which has endowed it with flexibility in research and breadth of insight. Mas'ūd Ṣaḥrāwī, in his book *Pragmatics among Arab Scholars*, states, "Pragmatic study does not stem from a single source; rather, its sources are diverse, for each of its major concepts originates from a particular field of

knowledge. Thus, 'speech acts', for example, is a pragmatic concept that emerged from a general philosophical climate, namely, the current of 'analytic philosophy' with its methods, trends, and issues. Likewise, the concept of 'conversational theory' emerged from the philosophy of Paul Grice, whereas relevance theory was born from the field of cognitive psychology, and so forth ..."

- Pragmatic considerations may thus be identified among the two groups of thinkers. Primarily, among those who adhere to the truth values of sentences, particularly in relation to the language of each community and to what are termed "natural languages," as well as to the constraints surrounding the presence of the "I" or the "you". This presence does not necessarily require explicit identification or determination of its meaning. However, across all the roles, the context of the exchange of intentions influences the realisation of meaningful content. These are represented, to varying degrees, by logician-philosophers such as Frege, Russell, Carnap, and Bar-Hillel, most of whom address the pragmatic dimension, that is, the role of speakers and context as elements requiring due attention.
- Hence, either the formal language of science must be set aside, as in the case of Frege and Carnap, or it must be absorbed through processes of abstraction and formalisation, as with Russell and Quine, or it must at times be handled through strategies akin to judo manoeuvres, as with Montague and Gochet.

At a secondary level, reflections close to pragmatics emerge among those who have long been concerned with the effects of speakers' discourse upon listeners, including sociologists, psychotherapists specialising in rhetoric, and practitioners of communication and discourse analysis, such as Perelman, Ducrot, Bourdieu, Kerbrat-Orecchioni, and Watzlawick. These are generally closer to the sources of pragmatics. Among the streams from which pragmatics has drawn are as follows:

2.1 Analytic Philosophy

The term "analysis" in language denotes "untying and opening"; thus, he untied or loosened the knot; that is, he opened it, and it came undone, meaning the resolution and decomposition of everything composite into its constituent parts.

In the philosophical domain, the term "analysis" signifies the decomposition or reduction of the subject under investigation to its sources or primary elements, whether the subject is an idea, a proposition, or a linguistic expression. It is closely associated with clarification. Hence, analytic philosophy may be defined as "the process of discovering the elements of a given subject for a specific purpose; this implies that the particular aim of analysis is to reduce the degree of ambiguity in composites by directing attention to the multiple parts of which they are composed".

In light of this, John Austin sought to establish a new philosophical discipline, namely, the philosophy of language. Austin's 1955 lectures aimed to call into question the foundations of Anglo-Saxon analytic philosophy at the time, a foundation premised on the notion that language primarily serves to describe reality.

The influence of the philosophy of language is also evident in the work of Searle, particularly in his book *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, where having benefited from Austin, he imparted a degree of systematic organisation to his teacher's ideas.

2.2 Sociolinguistics:

Pragmatics and sociolinguistics interact in fields of shared concern. The latter has contributed to specific areas of pragmatics, particularly in the study of socially influential vocabulary, speech acts, and their uses.

Pragmatics thus provides tools for understanding the functions of speech and interactive contexts, whereas sociolinguistics examines the social factors that influence the selection of these functions. When combined, they enable an understanding not only of what is said but also of why it is said and how it varies across societies and social groups.

2.3 Psycholinguistics and Developmental Psychology

Pragmatics maintains significant and vital relationships with psycholinguistics. There exists a connection between it and cognitive psychology, particularly in theories of language processing and production, as well as in the development of concepts such as illocutionary force, implicature, and presupposition. Developmental psychology, in turn, is related to pragmatics, especially in the field of language acquisition and the role of context in this process. Recently, what is termed developmental pragmatics has emerged.

2.4 Generative Semantics

Generative semantics emerged under the leadership of Ross, McCawley, and Lakoff within transformational-generative grammar. They conceived the fundamental principle that the basic component of transformational-generative grammar is directly linked to semantic structure. It was therefore natural for this conception to lead to an integration whereby the two could no longer ultimately be separated, with semantics appearing deeper than syntax. This situation brought the core of grammatical rules into focus. It led to the incorporation of pragmatic concerns into semantics and, by extension, into syntax such that meaning came to be treated as a whole within formal conditions (deep structures).

With the decline of the 1970s, the model of generative semantics came under intense criticism, and grammarians began to favour a more integrated position. Grice's work on "conversational implicature" catalysed this development, enabling linguists to draw a clear distinction between logical semantics and pragmatics.

These constitute the principal sources from which pragmatics has drawn its research. Conversely, it becomes evident to what extent pragmatics represents a rich crossroads for the intersection of disciplines, including linguistics, logic, semiotics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. The system of intersections is one of convergence and divergence.

Pragmatics thus appears as one of the components of semiotics in the traditions of Carnap, Morris, and Sebeok, as well as in those of Mead, Morris, and Bateson, thereby acquiring an empirical, natural, and fundamental character. However, its logical and formal nature has sparked considerable debate. Pragmatics inherits the legacy of the linguistics of enunciation, and behind it stands a body of achievements of the analytic movement in philosophy, as well as, more directly, the manifestation of ordinary language. Pragmatics has emerged and developed through successive processes of differentiation and unification, and its unity today is not guaranteed, given the numerous competing approaches in the struggle to construct. Since pragmatics lies at the intersection of philosophical and linguistic research, it is necessary to elucidate the most closely related domains, such as linguistics, pragmatist philosophy, analytic philosophy, and semantics.

3. The Relationship between Pragmatics and Linguistic Research:

3.1 Linguistics and pragmatics:

Pragmatics is considered a branch of linguistic studies that developed in the 1970s. As described by Françoise Armengaud, it is "a new and abundant field, yet one that does not possess clearly defined boundaries ... pragmatics, as an outcome of dynamic studies, lies at the intersection of philosophical and linguistic research, although it remains, at present, unfamiliar". Muhammad 'Alī al-Khūlī (1982) identifies the aspects encompassed by the term linguistics, confining them to phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, psychological, social, and lexicographical phenomena. These all fall under theoretical linguistics and are related to applied linguistics, whose branches include lexicography, computational linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, language teaching, contrastive linguistics, and error analysis.

Structural linguistics is characterised as formal and abstract; that is, it is detached from actual speech events in concrete reality. This has rendered its descriptive apparatus deficient in specification and reference because of its lack of interpretive referential rules. For instance, the utterance "They have increased the taxes" is one for which structural linguistics provides no rule to interpret the pronoun to which the verb "increased" is attributed or to determine the referent to which it refers in the external reality beyond language, except for certain functional linguistic approaches that have emerged in recent years, such as Simon Dik's theory of functional grammar. His theory is not structural; rather, it is more strongly influenced by pragmatics.

In pragmatics, however, mechanisms or several mechanisms exist for interpreting such pronouns and determining their referents in external reality. This endows pragmatics with certain advantages over structural linguistics, such as its direct connection with the external world. With the exception of the relevant authorities, the external reality acknowledges that no one has the authority to increase taxes.

What may be concluded from the foregoing is that pragmatics constitute the foundation of linguistics, as described by Rudolf Carnap.

3.2 Pragmatist Philosophy and Pragmatics

Pragmatism is a wide-ranging philosophical movement that seeks to formulate concepts, hypotheses, and theories and to philosophise the methods of their justification. It interprets reality in relation to human beings in terms of considerations of adequacy and utility in meeting their interests and needs.

Through these perspectives, one enters the domain of utilitarianism, which extends beyond the boundaries of pragmatics from a purely linguistic standpoint.

Pragmatist philosophy consists of a set of diverse and, at times, conflicting ideologies; it has never been a single unified intellectual method, nor is it so even today. Among the pioneers who gained prominence during the last three decades of the nineteenth century in America are Charles Peirce, his associate William James, and the educational philosopher John Dewey. This pragmatist triad did not emerge by chance; rather, several factors contributed to its emergence as a prominent philosophical movement.

Pragmatics, in its utilitarian sense, may intersect with pragmatist philosophy insofar as both are concerned with how human needs are fulfilled and with the principle of utility grounded in meaning.

3.3 Semantics and pragmatics:

Semantics assumes a specific conception, defined in terms of the semantic function of syntactic structures, which is based on the literal meaning conveyed by the sentence. In other words, within this particular conception, semantics does not focus on extralinguistic dimensions; rather, it is grounded in the uttered expression itself. This specific conception of semantics serves as the basis for comparisons drawn between semantics and pragmatics. Accordingly, these comparisons represent a distinction between pragmatics and semantics in their specific sense prior to the emergence and consolidation of pragmatics within linguistic studies in Arab thought.

The determination of the terminological concept of pragmatics has consistently been associated with distinguishing it from semantics on the one hand and from syntax on the other. This association began with the earliest presentation of the concept of pragmatics by Morris (1938), who compared it with syntax and semantics. Subsequent research and studies have taken Morris's distinction as a point of departure, as well as his definition, to construct the terminological concept on its basis. If we

define linguistic pragmatics more precisely, it concerns the meanings that expressions in languages have for their users and interpreters. What, then, is the difference between it and semantics?

If semantics is concerned with meaning as a binary relation between form and meaning (S signifies P), for example, "I feel somewhat hungry", meaning "I am hungry," then pragmatics may be viewed as a ternary relation between (speaker, meaning, and expression) (A signifies P by means of S). Once the speaker is present in the utterance, it becomes difficult to exclude the addressee since what the speaker utters derives its meaning from the speaker's intention to produce a particular effect on the addressee. The speaker's meaning fundamentally presupposes a context of both specific and general shared knowledge between the interlocutors, and this context of knowledge includes the place and time of the utterance.

In sum, the domain of pragmatics is defined by a speech situation that encompasses not only the utterance, the speaker, and the listener but also the shared knowledge of these elements, both specific and general; that is, "the context of the utterance". Leech proposed several fundamental points to distinguish the pragmatic perspective from the syntactic and semantic perspectives. These points are as follows:

- The semantic determination of a sentence differs from its pragmatic interpretation.
- Semantics is governed by rules (syntactic in nature), whereas pragmatics is governed by principles (rhetorical in nature).
- Grammatical rules are essentially conventional, whereas the general principles of pragmatics are fundamentally nonconventional and are related to conversational goals.
- General pragmatics links meaning (*sens*), or the grammatical meaning of an utterance, to pragmatic force or illocutionary force, and this relationship may be manifested in both direct and indirect speech.
- Rule-based schemata precisely define grammatical correspondences, whereas pragmatic correspondences are defined through problems and their resolution.
- Grammatical explanations are primarily formal, whereas pragmatic explanations are primarily functional.
- Grammar is purely abstract, whereas pragmatics is textual and concerned with communicative coherence among individuals.
- Grammar may be described as consisting of discrete, well-defined categories, whereas continuous, indeterminate gradations characterise pragmatics.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, pragmatic linguistics has multiple sources, as it emerged from linguistic and critical studies, as well as from structural and transformational-generative linguistic approaches, all of which contributed, albeit indirectly, to its formation, enabling it to render literary texts more accessible in the pursuit of objectivity.

From the foregoing discussion, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Pragmatic linguistics has its roots in the Arab tradition, as evidenced by features of successful discourse, as reflected in the theoretical studies of al-Jāhiz, Abū Hilāl al-'Askarī, and Ibn Qutaybah.
- Al-Jāhiz's *al-Bayān wa al-Tabyīn* constitutes the core of pragmatic work, as it is grounded in the process of influencing and persuading the receiver through argumentative functions.
- Pragmatics is characterised by its grounding in reality, such as its direct connection with the external world, which brings it into intersection with structural linguistics. Thus, pragmatics may be regarded as the foundation of linguistics, as Rudolf Carnap described it.
- Leech's distinction between pragmatic, syntactic, and semantic perspectives elucidates the importance of pragmatics within context, where it can generate rich meanings.
- The semantic determination of a sentence differs from its pragmatic interpretation.
- Pragmatics appears to be strongly concerned with context, as it constitutes the channel through which both specific and general knowledge shared by interlocutors is clarified, that is, what is known as the "context of the utterance."
- Pragmatics has succeeded in rendering texts more accessible by interpreting meanings with greater precision, focusing on the ternary relationships among the speaker, meaning, and expression.

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