Where did pragmatics come from ?

Abstract

The present study is concerned with the early beginnings of pragmatics. It investigated the linguistic and philosophical backgrounds of this field. It was argued that pragmatics grew within philosophy and its emergence as an independent field was, for some time, delayed by the influence of some linguistic theories especially the generative-transformational theory. Finally, it was pointed out that this field was freed from the influence of this theory.

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Although many scholars, philosophers and linguists, have been studying various types of pragmatic topics such as indexicality, implicatures, illocutionary force, speech acts, presuppositions, etc. For hundreds of years, pragmatics as a field has not emerged until recently. Not only that, but it has been denied the status of a component of grammar besides the phonological, syntactic, and semantic components which altogether constitute the core components of human language grammar. Critics have questioned the nature and the domain of this field; that is the theoretical as well as the practical status of the field in general.

It seems that the scholars' attitude toward pragmatics has been the result of radical theorizations in the main trend of theoretical linguistics motivated primarily by the structural and generative-transformational linguistic theories. The present study will attempt to explore briefly the background of this field, its development, and the reasons that stood behind the delay of its emergence and institutionalization.

Philosophy and the Study of Language

In order to have a better understanding of the background of pragmatics, one needs to examine the role of philosophy in the description of human language and the development of linguistics as a science. As a science. As a field, the study of language was born in the heart of philosophy.

ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة للتعرف على البدايات المبكرة لعلم المقا مية. بحثت الدراسة في الخلفيات اللغوية والفلسفية التي تقف وراء هذا العلم.ثم حاولت الدراسة التدليل على أن علم المقامية قد نشأ في حضن الفلسفة وأن بعض النضريات اللغوية عملت ولبعض الوقت على تأخير ظهور هذا العلم. وأخيرا أشارت الدراسة إلى أن علم المقامية قد انعتق من تأثير النظريات اللغوية وخاصة النظرية اللغوية التوليدية التحويلية.

Traditionally, the study of language was made for philosophical purposes. It is believed that the Greek and the Roman philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine and others studied language as a tool to serve them in their philosophical debates and discussions. Language occupied a central position in those debates. Therefore, the philosophers' interest in language was specifically directed to the meaning as structured by the language units and the way these units were organized logically and effectively to express the philosophical views. The writings of the Greek and Roman philosophers are full of grammatical and semantic terms and concepts and even linguistic patterns (Robins, 1971).

There is no doubt that the influence of philosophy on the study of language is immense in the sense that study of human language was dominated by philosophical principles and arguments which eventually led to a delay in the emergence of autonomous linguistics. It is true that philosophy has exerted negative influence on the study of language sometimes, especially with regard to the methodology imposed on grammar, philosophy; nevertheless, is appreciably credited for its contributions to the development of semantics in particular and pragmatics later on. Without the efforts of the philosophers including the 20th century philosophers such as Russell, Wittgenstein, Carnap, Quine, Ryle and Strawson, among others, the study of meaning in particular could have been far behind nowadays. More will be said about the role of the philosophers in laying the grounds for the establishment of pragmatics shortly.

Linguistics and Meaning

Linguistics, which is defined as the science of language, focuses on the structure of language whereas the use and the function are kept aside. As established by the structural linguists, linguistics aims at describing the phonological, morphological and grammatical systems of language on the basis of well-defined discovery procedures and syntagamatic and paradigmatic relations. The study of meaning was unfavorable subject due to conceptual and methodological reasons. It is true, for example, that Bloomfield, the leading structural linguist, defines the notion of "meaning", but he was aware of the perplexity of the subject and he accordingly settled down his uncertainty concerning this issue by declaring that "The statement of meaning is therefore the weak point in language-study, and will remain so until human knowledge advances very far beyond the present state" (1933:140). The consequence of this declaration was decisive and damaging to the study of meaning within structural linguistics. Commenting on this position, Leech (1983a:2) points out that "his conclusion, not surprisingly, sounded a pessimistic note, which turned out to be the virtual death-knell of semantics in the USA for the next twenty years ". However, the study of meaning within the context of philosophy was not affected by this linguistic decision. It is evident that the study of meaning during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s ruled out the possibility of recognizing. It as a separate component besides other components in the linguistic theory. Of course, the situation of the newly born pragmatics was no better all.

It is worth noting that our approach of tackling the pragmatic question in the present study, as has been realized by now by the reader, stems from our belief that semantics and pragmatics complement each other. That is we follow Leech's (1983a) complementarism. Therefore, the investigation of the roots of pragmatics requires an investigation in the status of the allied semantic component in the theory of grammar.

Interestingly enough, while the structural revolution in linguistics was under way in the 1930s, the philosopher C. Morris introduced his famous definition of pragmatics. Pragmatics, he says, is "the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters ". Busying themselves with the phoneme, the morpheme, the immediate constituents, and of the various methodological operations, the linguists of the time largely ignored the birth of pragmatics. The declaration seems to have been a big cry in a deep valley and it fell on deaf ears. Subsequent developments in linguistics in the 1940s and 1950s did confirm the above conclusion. At the beginning, the generative-transformational theory, which is considered another revolution in linguistics (Searle, 1972), excluded the semantic component from the grammar probably due to the fact that Chomsky himself was still under the influence of structural linguistics in which he grew and was educated (see Chomsky, 1957). The incorporation of semantic component as structured by Katz and Fodor (1963) in the organization of grammar by Chomsky (1965) settled the status of semantics as a core component of grammar. But, this theory has had a far reaching impact on the development of pragmatics due to its radical theorizations about language and linguistics and the new concepts introduced by this theory.

By introducing the competence/ performance dichotomy, the insistence on the central role of syntax in the grammar of language, and the searching for universal and abstract principles have encouraged many scholars to disregard performance, generally associated with language use and function, in language description. The finalization of Chomsky's Standard Theory (1965), the theorizations of structural linguistic theory and the claims of philosophical theories on semantic problems resulted in piling numerous meaning notes on the table to be knocked off into the waste-basket as called by Bar-Hillel (1971:405). This situation is best described by Yule (1996: 405). He remarks that:

> The emphasis has been on discovering some of the abstract principles that lie at the very core of language. By placing investigation of the abstract, potentially universal, features of language in the center of their work tables, linguists and philosophers tented to push any notes they had on everyday language use to the edges. As the tables got crowded, many of those notes on ordinary language in use began to be knocked off and ended up in the waste-basket.

Two waste-baskets, semantic and pragmatic, were standing by the table. Any item which did not fit in the syntactic component ended up in the semantic waste-basket. In other words, semantics is viewed as the waste-basket of syntax.

As the semantic waste-basket was filled out, linguists turned to the other basket to drop more notes in it especially the "unaccounted for" issues within the semantic theory. It is imagined that such waste-basket would be the basket for all the discarded linguistic notes. In this regard, Mey (2001:2) notes that:

> The semantic waste-basket being filled to the brim, another waste-basket had to be created to catch the overflow. As time went by, the linguists dropped more and more of their unresolved questions into this new, pragmatic basket, which became a not-too- tidy collection of rather heterogeneous problems, many of which kept bothering the linguists.

Within this context and in a more explicit language, Horn (1988:114) identifies those things which belong to pragmatics as he says:

> If a phenomenon can be shown to be ill-behaved and variable to be treated coherently within the syntactic or semantic component, and if it doesn't seem to be quite arbitrary enough for the lexicon or quite phonological enough for the phonology, it must be pragmatic.

The Pragmatic Paradigm

By the late 1960s, the linguistic wars between the generative syntacticians and generative semanticists broke out (Harris,1993). The rebellious students of Chomsky, dissatisfied with his syntactic theorizations and the central role given to syntax in the grammar of language, proposed a semantics-based model in which they challenged the syntactic model. This development forced Chomsky to modify his model by extending it to include a role for surface structure in determining the meaning of the sentence, but this did not resolve all the disputed issues between the parties. The second development was the publication of influential books and articles on the philosophy of language during this period such as How To Do Things With Words by Austin (1962) and Speech Acts by Searle (1968). The third development which played a significant role in shaping the intellectual atmosphere of that period was the introduction of the "communicative competence" by Hymes (1972) in order to contradict the grammatical competence " as proposed by Chomsky (1965) earlier. All these developments laid the grounds for the emergence of the pragmatic paradigm, following Kuhn's (1964) characterization of the notion of paradigm. The change may be viewed as a kind of shift from the paradigm of theoretical grammar to the paradigm of language user.

Practically, a process of colonization involving new and brave settlers trying to expand their horizons by venturing into uncharted territory was taking place. This is low Leech (1983b) describes the development of modern pragmatics. He further notes that "this characterization was only the last stage of a wave-by-wave expansion of linguists from a narrow discipline dealing with the physical data of speech to a broad discipline taking in form, meaning, and context" (1983b:2). The territory of pragmatics has long been a territory cultivated exclusively by philosophers. It was only after the publication of Searle's aforementioned book that Robert, Lakoff, and Ross found the courage to decide to settle in and cultivate that land. It is no exaggeration, then, to argue that pragmatics grew first in the territory of philosophy and flourished in it which became known and recognized as pragmatic territory. Mey (2001:22) correctly asserts that:

> It was not the linguists who were the first to discover and explain the terra incognita of pragmatics, but the philosophers, whose reflection on language had a significant impact on the development of modern linguistics, especially pragmatics.

Pragmatics and its Status in Linguistic Theory

Unlike the core components of grammar which have been defined strictly, pragmatics has been defined in different ways. Almost every book and even every article on pragmatics introduce a definition of pragmatics. The differences between these definitions are sometimes terminological and some other times conceptual and ideological. But each of these definitions implies some aspects about the domain of pragmatics. Besides the definition advanced by Morris alluded to earlier, described as

vague, most of the definitions center on one main idea; that is meaning in context, or in interaction or meaning without truth conditions (Stalnker, 1972; Leech 1983b; Levinson, 1983; Kempson, 1988; Green 1989; Mey 2001; Verschueren, 1999). Two of these definitions are quite different from the others because of the type of parameters involved in the definitions. Green (1989:2) sees pragmatics as located "at the intersection of a number of fields within and outside of cognitive science: not only linguistics, cognitive, cultural anthropology, and philosophy…, but also sociology…and rhetoric contribute to its domain": Verschueren (1999:7) defines pragmatics as "a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behavior". Broad as they stand, these definitions are quite elaborated and comprehensive.

According to the philosophical classification made by C. Morris, R. Carnap and C. Peirce, pragmatics is listed next to semantics and syntax. But this classification is incompatible with linguistic classification in which pragmatics has no place in the theory of grammar. Levinson (1983) has expressed his concern and ambition about incorporating pragmatics, as a separate component, in a general linguistic theory. This seems to be the tendency of structural scholars whose theorizations about language and linguistics are different from those made by the generative grammarians who insist on excluding pragmatics. Chomsky adopts a radical view in this regard. It is known that he recognizes on type of competence, namely grammatical competence. But following the developments in linguistics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he started to talk about what he calls "pragmatic competence". Pragmatic competence, he says "places language in the institutional setting of its use, relating intentions and purposes to the linguistic means at hand" (1980:225).

Chomsky's position about the status of pragmatics in the theory of grammar or competence is unquestionably decisive. Employing his classical distinction between competence and performance as well as his distinction between the ordinary and technical senses of the term "competence", Chomsky rejects any a role for pragmatics in his linguistic theory of competence. He asserts that:

> If we are using the term "competence" in my technical sense, then pragmatics is not part of linguistic competence… If we are using the term "competence" in its ordinary English sense, then I suppose one might say that pragmatics is part of linguistic competence (1999:401).

Conclusion

The previous discussion made it clear that pragmatics has emerged as an independent field from the philosophers' works in the first place and developed later by prominent linguists and semanticists. It was evident that the intellectual atmosphere was inappropriate to accommodate pragmatics in a theory of grammar in the first half of the twentieth century due to the dominance of and the preachings of structural linguists. Furthermore, the theorization of generative linguists have significantly shaped the map of linguistics by stressing the centrality of the syntactic component and disregarding the role performance in the theory of grammar. The delay of the recognition of the semantic component in the theory of grammar did actually influence the recognition of pragmatics not only as a component in the grammar but as a field in the first place.

11

Today, pragmatics has its own theory and applications. Many books and articles on pragmatics have been published in the last two decades. We think that the 1980s decade is best described as the decade of pragmatics not only because of the numerous books and articles that appeared in it but also because of the several pragmatic conferences held during that period. Also, pragmatics is viewed as a field with different types such as functionalist, psycholinguistic, conversational, micro, macro, inter-cultural, and inter-language pragmatics. In the light of the current research findings, we think that there will be a more promising future for pragmatics ahead. Finally, we conclude with the following rhetorical question: Will Gazdar's (1979) prediction concerning the fall of the semantic wall come true?

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