

10 Pragmalinguistics and Stylistics

While the field of pragmatics in its widest sense is constituted of many diverse approaches (without clear-cut boundaries) united by a common functional (social, cultural, cognitive) perspective on language in communication (cf. Verschueren 1999), **pragmalinguistics** (*linguistic pragmatics, pragmatic linguistics, internal pragmatics*) focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on the study of linguistic phenomena (i.e., code) from the point of view of their usage. As it is impossible to offer an exhaustive definition of pragmatics, it might be easier simply to present a list of the topics studied: deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts and aspects of discourse structure (cf. Levinson 1983; for the scope of pragmatics and the detailed coverage of its major topics see Tárnayiková 2000).

10.1 Deixis and Presupposition

The phenomenon of **deixis** fixes the utterance in the physical (*temporal* and *spatial deixis*, see Reference, 5.1.1) and social (*social deixis*, which includes *person deixis* and *attitudinal deixis*, see also 9.1) context of its use. Deixis, which may also be used 'self-referentially' to point to itself (*discourse deixis*, see Endophoric reference, 5.1.1), is realized by *indexical (deictic) expressions*, such as personal and possessive pronouns, adverbials, verbal categories of person and tense, but also by politeness and phatic formulae.

Presupposition represents the amount of information assumed to be known by participants (*background knowledge, common ground*) and has direct impact on how much is explicitly said and how much remains implicit. Since it is normally not necessary, let alone possible, to be fully explicit, a certain level of balance is strived for by the participants who take into consideration various factors (see 3.2); for example, the medium of writing tends to be more explicit as participants do not share the time and space, often an unknown (general) addressee is projected with whom the amount of the shared knowledge can only be estimated.

10.2 Speech Acts

The theory of **speech acts** (J.L.Austin and J.R.Searle) concerns the language user's intention to attain certain communicative goals by performing acts through the use of language. From the stylistic perspective, Austin's three types of speech act (*locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary*) are of special relevance, since it is esp. the variety of possible illocutions (i.e., uses which language can be put to) which offers innumerable choices. The types of speech acts as proposed by Searle (*assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations*) are (loosely) associated with certain linguistic categories (utterance types) (cf. Tárnayiková 1985). Of special significance is the relation between locution (*locutionary meaning* or *propositional meaning*) and illocution (*illocutionary meaning*, or *illocutionary force*) as this is not always of the one-to-one type: one locution may have more than one illocution. For example, *The dinner is ready* may be announcement, invitation, threat, command, etc. Conventionally, this utterance will be interpreted as an invitation to join the table rather than an announcement, hence an example of an **indirect speech act**. The use of indirect illocutions in preference to direct ones is often driven by the need to protect partner's face (i.e., politeness concerns, esp. in requests and refusals, see 8.2). Similarly, the strategy of **hedging** is used to play down the illocutionary force of utterances (while demonstrating the metapragmatic awareness by explicitly referring to CP maxims) while employing a variety of linguistic manifestations (hedges, mitigators: *sort of, kind of, in a sense, I hate to say this*, partial agreement before presenting disagreement: *Yes,*

but..., using performatives in business correspondence: *We are sorry to have to tell you...*, etc.). **Weasel words** are used to temper the straightforwardness of a statement making thus one's views equivocal (e.g., *borrow* instead of *steal*, *crisis* instead of *war*); in the pejorative sense they help avoid responsibility for one's claim (e.g., *The results of the experiment appear to be in direct contradiction with the stated hypotheses*). Explicit use of performative verbs may cause a shift in formality level and create an atmosphere of authoritative claim (*Sit down, I beg you*).

10.3 Cooperative Principle

What is implied can be, and often is, 'strategically manipulated' with (the s.c. *strategic avoidance of explicitness*, Verschueren 1999), if not for outright lying, then certainly for attaining our goals in mundane conversational encounters. The **conversational implicature** was proposed (H.P. Grice) as a rational model guiding conversational interaction. Better known as the **Cooperative Principle** (CP), it includes four *conversational maxims*: *quantity*, *quality*, *relation*, *manner* (Sperber and Wilson 1986 in their Relevance Theory superimpose the principle of *relevance* over other maxims). Although presupposed to be adhered to by the participants, the maxims are often deliberately flouted, e.g., in phatic or small talk (*quantity*), 'white lies' (*quality*), humour, irony, teasing, banter, puns (*manner*), topic shift, seemingly irrelevant remarks whose relevance is implied and may only be disclosed by inference (*relation*). Some **tropes** (figures of speech) are built on the breach of CP: *hyperbole* (exaggeration: *to wait an eternity*), *litotes* (understatement, esp. that in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of its contrary: *not bad at all*), *tautology* (repetition: *War is war, and there will be losers*), *paraphrase*, *euphemism*, *metaphor* and esp. *irony* (conveys a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning: *How nice!* said after someone's *I failed another exam*). The maxims of CP are successfully applied in literary stylistics, for example in order to draw 'pragmatic portraits' of fictional heroes (Leech 1992, Ferenčík 1999b).

10.4 Politeness Principle

As can be seen from the previous examples, the maxims of CP are often conventionally suppressed in favour of maintaining the 'social equilibrium' which may be just as important as the cooperation itself (it may even be more important as in *white lies*, i.e., minor, polite, or harmless lies). The need not to cause any damage to and to uphold each others' **face** (e.g., not criticizing the quality of service or food in the restaurant directly) is the central problem of the theories of **politeness**. G. Leech (1983) proposes the six maxims of **Politeness Principle** (PP) as a way of complementing the CP and thus 'rescuing' it from serious 'trouble' (i.e., accounting for the situations when a strict adherence to CP would be unacceptable): *tact*, *generosity*, *approbation*, *modesty*, *agreement*, *sympathy*.

The tact maxim regulates the operation of the directive speech acts (which are marked with highest face-threatening potential) and addresses the dominant type of politeness which, with regard to the addressee, can be 'measured' on the **cost-benefit scale**: the more costly an action, the less polite it is, and, conversely, the more beneficial it is to the addressee, the more polite it is. This helps explain why, for example, imperative mood is not necessarily associated with impoliteness: *Bring me some water* vs. *Have another drink*. Next, **optionality scale** is used to rank options according to the degree of choice offered to the addressee - the degree of politeness matches the degree of indirectness (tentativeness), and, vice versa, increased directness

results in greater impoliteness (e.g., *Lend me your car* vs. *Do you think you could possibly lend me your car?*). It appears that while imperatives offer little option of whether or not to comply with the action requested (*Give me some change*), questions (*Have you got a quarter, by any chance?*), hypothetical formulations (*Could I borrow some money?*), and ones using negatives (*You couldn't lend me a dollar, could you?*) provide greater freedom to deny that request. Of course, politeness formulae (*please*) can always be added to give extra politeness.

We should also differentiate between **absolute** and **relative** politeness; in the absolute sense, *Lend me your car* is less polite than *I hope you don't mind my asking, but I wonder if it might be at all possible for you to lend me your car*. However, in some situations, the former request could be overpolite (among family members) and the latter one impolite (as an ironic remark).

10.5 Politeness Strategies and Face

The aspects of **face** (i.e., a self-image or impression of oneself presented publicly) are studied within the theories of politeness among which a prominent place is held by Brown and Levinson's (1987) model. They claim that in any social interaction participants devote much of their time to **face-work**, i.e., strategies attending to aspects of their own face (viz. attempting not to lose it) as well as of other's face (not threatening it by performing a **face-threatening act**, such as requesting, denying an invitation, rejecting an offer, or an other-repair, cf. 8.2).

There are two types of face: **negative face** (the freedom of individual action, a desire to be unimpeded) and **positive face** (the need to be treated as equal, a desire for approval). Corresponding to these are the two types of strategies: **negative politeness strategies** (strategies of independence, also called *deference politeness* strategies) attend to hearer's negative face and include the use of expressions indicative of indirectness, tentativeness, impersonality, social distance: mitigators (*Sorry to interrupt, but...*), euphemisms and politically correct language; **positive politeness strategies** (strategies of involvement, also called *solidarity politeness* strategies) attempt to save hearer's positive face by emphasizing closeness, intimacy, commonality and rapport.

The key factors determining the choice of appropriate strategy are, a) the relationship between participants, i.e., their relative power (social status) difference, and their social distance (the degree of closeness), and, b) the degree of imposition/urgency (K.C.C.Kong (1998) adds a mutual expectation of relationship continuity as another factor). Depending on the degree of threat upon the addressee's face, five **politeness strategies** can be identified: a) **bald-on-record** (open, direct) in case the risk of loss of face is minimum (*Fetch me some water*), b) **solidarity politeness** which addresses the common ground (*I know I can always rely on you, could you lend me your typewriter?*), c) **deference politeness**, when the imposition is serious (*I hate to impose on you but I wonder if you could possibly let me use your computer?*), d) **off record**, an imposition is so great that it must be proffered indirectly (*I'm all out of money* - this may be a source of ambiguity since it is up to the hearer to interpret this as a request), e) **not saying anything**, since the threat of loss of face is too great (for the politeness strategies employed in radio phone-in talk shows see Ferenčík (2002b)).

From the viewpoint of language users' intentions, their choices from the total pool of resources and the effects upon other participants, the legitimacy of the pragmatic perspective for stylistically-oriented study can hardly be denied.