

Book Review

Anne O'Keeffe, Brian Clancy, and Svenja Adolphs, *Introducing pragmatics in use*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 260, Paperback GBP 23.99. ISBN: 9781138482005

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1 Introduction

Introducing pragmatics in use is a readable book written by Anne O'Keeffe, Brian Clancy, and Svenja Adolphs which covers not only theories in core component areas but also applications of corpus methodology. Compared with the first edition of the book, it has the comprehensive theoretical overviews, abundant real data, corresponding tasks, and great perception in the unexplored or emerging field of pragmatics. At present, corpus pragmatics is developing fast due to the advancement of computer technology and the increasing availability of free corpora, and researching pragmatics using corpus software is a trend. As a result, it is necessary to introduce corpus pragmatics and its methodology in detail, which will bring new findings in pragmatics or other fields such as language teaching with the help of corpus tools. In this respect, *Introducing pragmatics in use* is a very good choice for readers to increase their comprehension of corpus pragmatics and put its methodology into practice.

2 Introduction to *Introducing pragmatics in use*

Introducing pragmatics in use is a 260-page volume consisting of nine chapters. The content of the whole book can be divided into four parts as follows: an overview of pragmatics (Part One), methodological approaches (Part Two), applications of corpus methodology in core component areas (Part Three), and pragmatic instruction in language teaching (Part Four). The first part is made up of introductory matters, including the history, origin and emergence of pragmatics, the basic functions of corpus tools, and an overview of different research approaches. Corpus pragmatics (Part Two) is the thematic thread which connects the primary focus on the applications of corpus methodology in

the core component areas such as deixis, politeness, speech acts, language variety, and register (Part Three) with the main goal: pragmatic instruction in language teaching (Part Four).

2.1 Overview of pragmatics

The first part of the book is an overall overview of pragmatics (Chapter One), where the authors supplement the history, origin, and the emergence of pragmatics, underline the empirical turn in pragmatics, conclude the basic functions of corpus tools, and offer multiple ways of researching pragmatics.

Chapter One begins with a perusal of the history of pragmatics and introduces two different schools of thought: the Anglo-American tradition and the Continental European tradition. The former treats language within a micro-component view and the latter a macro-perspective view, both of which are taken in the book to “add to the breadth and depth of the field (p. 2).” After reviewing the history, the authors turn to various specific methods of researching pragmatics, which are examined in practice at length in the following chapters (the five chapters in Part Three). Moreover, the empirical turn in pragmatics (p. 3) has been clearly put forward and emphasized and thus corpus pragmatics as an analytic framework is highlighted because it provides a relatively new methodology model for researchers to collect and analyze large quantities of language samples in empirical research.

2.2 Methodological approaches

Part Two involves Chapter Two and Chapter Three, each of which presents methodological approaches but with a different focus in each chapter. Chapter Two generally concludes how pragmatics can be researched, while Chapter Three focuses on the methodological approaches of corpus pragmatics.

Starting from a summary of both intuitive and empirical approaches, the authors then discuss how to gather, elicit, and record language data within the empirical side of pragmatics research. There are three options for collecting empirical data: attestation, eliciting, and recording of language. The authors briefly describe attestation, since researchers seldom use it due to the difficulty in recording attested data and the fact that it is only a short instance of language which is usually used in the illustration and discussion of pragmatic phenomena. In the process of eliciting data, typical methods like DCTs (pp. 26–29), MCT questionnaires (pp. 29–30), role-plays (pp. 30–33), and interviews (pp.

33–34) are available and help researchers concentrate precisely on the elicited language data. Chapter Two ends with two alternatives for recording language: ethnographic approaches and language corpora. Ethnographic approaches ensure that researchers can record language as it happens in real time, whereas building small home-made corpora or using free large corpora allows the search for specific language items.

Chapter Three mainly introduces two different approaches in pragmatics by comparing the opposite directions from which pragmatics study and corpus linguistics work and addresses the processes of doing corpus pragmatics research in a way that accommodates both the form-to-function and function-to-form approach: one begins with the forms of naturally occurring language data and the other the function of speech acts or pragmatic phenomena. In terms of the form-to-function approach, there are four core investigative strategies put forward by Ädel and Reppen (2008) mentioned in this chapter: one-to-one searching, sampling, sifting, and frequency-based listing. Conversely, in terms of the function-to-form approach, the authors develop parallel strategies, namely “one-to-one searching, combined utilization of sampling, searching and sifting, and building on the findings of existing eliciting research (p. 57).” In addition, the authors indicate that pragmatic annotation is the key to the function-to-form approach, which has a great impact on this approach. However, there are many challenges to pragmatic annotation mentioned by the authors, such as the lack of precision in the automatic assignment of tags and too much human effort in the manual checking (p. 58). On the whole, the authors are still confident in the future of corpus pragmatics because corpus pragmatics is “useful in the hands of all pragmatics researchers (p. 67)” and pragmatic annotation is developing very fast now. At the end of Chapter Three, the authors call for open minds toward using them because both approaches have their own merits and demerits. Specifically, the form-to-function approach aligns well with pragmatics, but causes problems associated with functional diversity and ambiguity, whereas the function-to-form approach can deal with the problems but need the annotation.

The methodological approaches mentioned above are accessible, since they are demonstrated at length using different examples. What I want to draw attention to is that the authors express a strong preference for the corpus methodology, but they still remain neutral in all methods and remind readers of the methodological awareness that the research method and design should be chosen on the basis of the topic of the study and what methodology will best suit the study. This is because every method has its advantages and

disadvantages “in terms of degree of research control and interference (p. 23),” which result in changes in the precision and naturalness of the data.

2.3 Applications in core component areas

Part Three, Chapter Four to Chapter Eight, concentrates on the applications of the corpus methodology related to core component areas in pragmatics, namely reference, politeness, speech acts, and register, which are integral parts of pragmatics or ubiquitous in language use. These are the hotspot issues in the field of pragmatics as well, and thus the authors focus on these concepts and examine them to promote understanding of how to put the methodology of corpus pragmatics into practice.

“Reference” (Chapter Four) showcases the basic categories of reference and deixis and addresses linguistic processes that determine the referents or even the attitudes of the speakers in corpus pragmatics. This chapter begins with the general definition of reference and then goes into analytical depth in terms of how deictic reference can be examined by employing corpus methodology. This chapter focuses on exophoric reference in the form of deixis in the main and also demonstrates the potential of corpus linguistics in analyzing empathetic deixis (p. 91).

“Politeness” (Chapter Five) examines three distinct seminal theories of politeness or impoliteness, namely the face-saving theory (p. 103–114), impoliteness theory (p. 114–119), and discursive politeness theory (p. 119–122) and demonstrates key features of these theoretical approaches in the different contexts by analyzing corpus extracts. Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory is widely acknowledged, and they see that politeness is a complex system for softening face threats. Impoliteness theory focuses on impoliteness as an intentional and purposeful attack on the hearer’s face, and Watt’s discursive politeness theory illustrates the different aspects and variables associated with the phenomenon of politeness, which forms a sufficient contrast to the impoliteness theory. Besides these three theories, there are some other influential theories which give insights into the area of linguistic politeness as well. However, all of them suffer from different shortcomings and problems that lessen their efficiency, and they are thus criticized by many scholars.

“Speech acts” (Chapter Six) starts with a systematic overview of the speech act with the authors discussing the main arguments, including direct and indirect speech acts (p. 130), performatives and constatives (p. 125), giving a broad taxonomy of different speech act categories (p. 129), and addressing the underlying assumption that language is regarded as an act. The authors also

explore how to employ corpus methodology to study speech acts in more detail with the form-to-function approach. Moreover, the theory and practice related to discourse analysis (p. 140–143) is also presented in the end to better describe speech acts and discourse structure.

Chapter Seven centers on pragmatic variation within the same language, whereas Chapter Eight focuses on pragmatic variation in specific registers. “Pragmatics and language variation” explores the study of linguistic variation in general and then explores the variation of response tokens (p. 147–154), pragmatic markers (p. 154–159), vague language (p. 159–165), and speech acts (p. 165–170) through the comparative use of a range of corpora. Chapter Eight first explores the situational characteristics (p. 174) of specific registers, then concentrates on speaker turn and sequences of turns (p. 174–184) by employing corpus linguistics and conversation analysis in combination, and finally examines the usefulness of corpus tools such as keywords and multi-word units.

2.4 Pragmatic instruction in language teaching

Although Chapter Nine involves the application of the methodology of corpus pragmatics as well, it mainly highlights pragmatic instruction in language teaching, which is the main goal of the book.

The final chapter “Pragmatics and language teaching” addresses pragmatics in the specific domain of English language teaching and it covers the approaches, opportunities, advances, and the main challenge in pragmatics teaching. Due to the acceptance of communicative competence, the importance of pragmatics is valued in language teaching and results in a robust body of research on language teaching from the aspect of pragmatics. There are many considerations for how to teach pragmatics, and implicit versus explicit instruction is one of the considerations (p. 197–200). The debate whether to teach pragmatics implicitly or explicitly is discussed in detail, but no clear answer to this question is given by the authors. Furthermore, there are some technology-based opportunities in language teaching (p. 200–210): computer-mediated communication (CMC) and technology-enhanced learning (TEL).

To conclude, pragmatics research has generally provided a depth of empirical knowledge by employing a range of corpora while “the impact on language curricula, language materials and language classrooms is minimal (p. 225)” because pragmatic competence is still not considered as important as communicative competence in actual classroom practice. It is also important to note that the last chapter is based on studies related to the main pragmatic phenomena and key concepts in pragmatics (from Chapter Four to Chapter

Eight), which give insights into teaching pragmatics and then contribute to the development of language teaching.

3 Differences between the first and second editions

3.1 A separate chapter for corpus pragmatics

The most remarkable change in this book is that the authors devote a separate chapter to corpus pragmatics in order to impress the main focus of the book on readers, which is lacking in the first edition. As an integration of corpus linguistics and pragmatics, corpus pragmatics combines two methodologies from both fields and integrates the horizontal (qualitative) methodology typical of pragmatics with the vertical (quantitative) methodology predominant in corpus linguistics. Therefore, it can be said that corpus pragmatics is to a large extent a new methodology for researching pragmatics by employing the form-to-function approach and function-to-form approach. The form-to-function approach is frequently used in corpus linguistics, but is not always appropriate in all cases. The function-to-form approach is used to reduce the possibility of mismatching the research methods and pragmatic phenomena because there seems to be no one-to-one relationship between form and function. Hence, the function-to-form approach depends on pragmatic annotation, which is not widely used due to the fact that the automatic assignment of tags will often lack precision, while the manual implementation of tags is unavoidable but needs a large amount of time and resources. However, whatever the methodology is, it is crucial to have methodological awareness: applying appropriate approaches according to the specific research topics and even employing diverse approaches to achieve the research goal in some specific cases.

3.2 Focus shift

The second obvious change in the second edition is the shift in focus which occurs in Chapter Seven: The focus in the first edition, which is pragmatic variation across cultures and languages, becomes pragmatic vibration within language varieties because the unbalanced development of theories requires

scholars to take action, although there is too much research in second language acquisition, applied linguistics, language teaching, sociolinguistics, and so on.

It is worth noting that “Pragmatics and language variation” replaces “Pragmatics across languages and cultures,” which deletes relevant studies of pragmatics across cultures and languages and instead concentrates on studying pragmatic variation within the same language. The reason why the authors only focus on pragmatics at the level of language variety is that pragmatic variation across cultures and languages is quite difficult to study, and in other words an endless study, since every aspect of pragmatics can be compared across cultures and languages. In the first edition, the authors were already aware of the difficulties in researching pragmatics across cultures and languages and presented the following reasons. First, there is a lack of theoretical discussion, although there is much empirical research. Besides, at the level of terminology, this area is difficult to define and even the existing definitions confuse researchers and have limits in operationalization. Furthermore, there is a dispute about the universality of pragmatic norms. On the one hand, pragmatic norms indeed benefit researching pragmatics. On the other hand, research on pragmatics across cultures challenges the pragmatic norms. From my point of view, pragmatics across cultures is a fast-growing field and more theories need to be concluded based on empirical studies from the comparative research of key concepts in pragmatics such as politeness and speech acts. Therefore, it is wise for the authors to start with certain aspects which play important roles in pragmatics, since certain aspects are easier to study compared with the theoretical construction. In addition, the focus on pragmatic variation within the same language can avoid stereotypes and ethnocentrism.

3.3 Updating relevant research

Thirdly, relevant studies have been updated in accordance with new achievements in the field of pragmatics. The first edition was published in 2011 by Routledge and the second edition in 2020. In the meantime, new findings have been brought into the field of pragmatics due to the ongoing research which contribute to the better understanding of the specific topics or questioning of previous studies. For example, Plonsky and Zhuang’s (2019) meta-study (p. 200) is added to Chapter Nine and provides a useful contextualization in this chapter.

3.4 Other subtle changes

There are some subtle changes in Chapter Four, where the title has been replaced with “Reference” and non-deictic expressions are not mentioned. The first change is that the authors add the general definition of reference to this chapter to reduce terminology confusion and present the difference between reference and deixis. Reference is the relation between a linguistic expression and the concrete object or abstraction that it identifies, while deixis is the use of a word or phrase whose meaning depends on the context. In this chapter, the studies on reference in the main examine the different categories of deixis by analyzing extracts. However, sometimes the deixis functions non-deictically, which is called non-deictic expression, as mentioned in the first edition. Different from deictic expression, where immediate context or immediate setting must be present, non-deictic expression is known to be a non-obligatory element and thus is said to be often deleted. This does not mean that non-deictic expression does not have any value; on the contrary, the non-deictic may indicate the speaker's attitude or opinion. The reason why non-deictic expression is deleted is that scholars are studying non-deictic expression less and are mainly exploring non-deictic function and the value of demonstratives across languages. Besides, non-deictic expression should be considered from other aspects of pragmatics.

4 Features of the book

4.1 Task-based

The first defining feature of the second edition is the design of multiple tasks. As each chapter has demonstrated, the book is supplemented with corresponding research tasks. On the one hand, relevant research tasks promote understanding of the key concepts and main phenomenon in pragmatics. On the other hand, relevant research tasks following the research process addressed by the authors provide readers with opportunities to develop their application ability, which enables readers to put what they have learned from the book into practice. The addition of various tasks accords with the intent of the authors that “the book is offering models for both self-study and classroom practice (p. 226).”

4.2 Data-based

As the primary focus of the whole book is corpus methodology, the authors use a large amount of language data to demonstrate how these approaches work. Therefore, a range of corpora is employed in both the theoretical overview and the examination of the methodological approaches in core component areas such as deixis, politeness, speech acts, language variation, and register.

4.3 Great insights into research topics

The last feature of the book is its insights into research topics which are worth studying further. On the one side, Chapter Four to Chapter Nine are hotspot issues in pragmatics and other fields such as reference, politeness, and speech acts. The authors imply that the methodology of corpus pragmatics is appropriate and useful in the above areas, which sets good examples for readers who are interested in these fields.

On the other side, based on the research status, the book points out some topics which are either not widely studied or from an emerging field in pragmatics such as discourse and empathetic deixis in Chapter Four. Meanwhile the challenges are directly pointed out in the field of pragmatics which may to some degree turn into the research topics.

5 Significance of the book

In conclusion, I note that at the core of this book is corpus pragmatics. The book combines the overall introduction of influential theories and models and the applications of corpus methodology, which examines key concepts and the main phenomena in pragmatics such as reference, politeness, and speech acts. In addition, the authors directly point out some challenges and offer some research topics for further study.

This book is a welcome volume for students who are interested in corpus pragmatics. In a way, it can be considered as a guidebook for self-study and teaching in classrooms because it not only provides a firm theoretical base, but also illuminates this innovative methodology in detail. Through the examination of key concepts, huge amounts of corpora data, and relevant tasks aimed at putting theory into practice in every chapter, readers can master the

methodology and raise the methodological awareness for employing appropriate approaches and designing the research process in detail.

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