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# The origin and development of pragmatics as a study of meaning: semiotic perspective

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**Abstract:** Pragmatics has grown into a flourishing independent academic discipline. Undefined and unsolved are, nevertheless, such confusing and controversial concerns in its evolution as research boundaries and uncertain definition. Some academics view Austin's Speech Act Theory to be the birth of pragmatics, which certainly confines pragmatics to the field of linguistics and hence limits its study scope. This assertion is incongruous with Morris' primary objective of proposing the word *pragmatics* from the standpoint of semiotics, inspired by Peirce. This research intends to investigate pragmatics from the perspective of linguistic philosophy and semiotics and argues that pragmatics derives and develops from Peirce's pragmatist semiotics and Morris' behavioral semiotics. Pragmatics is the exertion of the "interpretant" in Pierce's Semiotics. Clearly, it is one of the three branches of Morris's semiotics that investigates the relationship between signs and sign users. The meaning of signs is derived from the interpretation of sign users. Pierce's pragmatism or pragmaticism is the intellectual foundation of pragmatics. As its research objective, it focuses on the relationship between meaning and context, i.e., the illocutionary meaning not covered by the study of semantics. Its primary methodology is based on logical reasoning.


**Keywords:** interpretant; meaning; pragmaticism; pragmatics; semiotics

## 1 Introduction

The formation, development, and prosperity of "pragmatics" have spanned over nearly a century. It is a relatively perfect discipline with the system of ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology. Many scholars claim that "pragmatics" originates from "How to do things with words" proposed by John L. Austin (1911–1960) in 1962. Herbert Paul Grice (1913–1988), John R. Searle (1932–), Stephen C.

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Levinson (1947–), Geoffrey Leech (1936–2014), Avram Noam Chomsky (1928–), and others have continuously supplemented and expanded speech act theory, which has developed vigorously and gradually developed to prosperity today. However, the definition and research scope of pragmatics as a field of study remain contested and ambiguous. In Section 1.2 *Defining Pragmatics* in his book *Pragmatics* (1983), Levinson did not provide a precise definition of pragmatics, but instead addressed a number of potential definitions. The fact that Chapter I spans 53 pages yet does not even provide a clear definition of pragmatics is disappointing. Levinson only says that “Such a definition is, however, by no means easy to provide, and we shall play with a number of possibilities each of which will do little more than sketch a range of possible scopes for the field” (Levinson 1983: 5). Accordingly, the complex historical vagaries of pragmatics result in two essential aspects of defining pragmatics and its research scopes or boundaries: the more specific definition of pragmatics from the school of Anglo-American analytical philosophy and the broader definition of pragmatics from the Continental School of Europe. Specifically, the former is represented by works such as Stephen C. Levinson’s *Pragmatics* (1983), Leech’s *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983), Jean Stilwell Peccei’s *Pragmatics* (2000), Ziran He’s *A Survey of Pragmatics* (1988), Zhaoxiong He’s *An Introduction to Pragmatics* (1989), and Wangqi Jiang’s *Pragmatics: Theories and Applications* (2000). The latter is represented by Jef Verschueren’s *Understanding Pragmatics* (2000) and Jacob Mey’s *Pragmatics: An Introduction* (1993). Continental School of Europe prefers to describe pragmatics in terms of linguistic and multidisciplinary domains, which is attributed to Saussure’s heritage. The Anglo-American School of Pragmatics attributes its semiotic features to the tradition of Peirce. However, “pragmatics” is not confined to speech act research; it seems that all thoughts, behaviors, ideas, emotions, and morality run through the theoretical application of “pragmatics” in the process of its development. It expresses the extraordinarily complex interpretation of signs arising from the behavioral signification and has a practical influence on human life. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to refer to Saussure’s traditional pragmatics as “linguistic pragmatics”, while Pierce’s pragmatics within the framework of logic semiotics can be named “logic pragmatics”. The analysis of the terminological intension and concepts of pragmatics could help clarify the theoretical and historical roots of “pragmatics”. This paper attempts to analyze pragmatics from the perspective of semiotics and philosophy, and to clarify the philosophical foundation, nature, scope, and methodology of pragmatics in order to examine the genesis, significance, and value of the field known as “pragmatics”. This study also focuses on the semiotic analysis of “pragmatics” and clarifies the distinctive research category of “pragmatics” by explicating its theoretical foundation and research objectives.

## 2 The origin and research category of pragmatics

Since the times of ancient Greece, Rome, and Pre-Qin China,<sup>1</sup> academics have never ceased to investigate pragmatic questions. The study subjects of ancient Greek and Roman pragmatics have emerged with eloquence. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) explored pragmatic concerns in the study of philosophy, logic, and rhetoric, as seen by Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* in *Organon*. In ancient China, the study of language use by the Pre-Qin scholars reflected a strong pragmatic tendency of Chinese philosophy since the Pre-Qin period, involving the rich pragmatic ideas contained in the theories of Confucian school as "Rectification of Names",<sup>2</sup> Taoist school "Nameless Thoughts"<sup>3</sup> and Naming schools "controlling name"<sup>4</sup> of renowned scholars. However, the disciplinary term "pragmatics" as a field of study did not arise until the 1930s. The birth of this term is not coincidental, but rather the result of the historical turn of language philosophy, i.e., the "linguistic turn" of the 19th century. The study of linguistic turn from the realm of psychology including thoughts and concepts to that of language pertaining to sentences and meanings.

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**1** Pre-Qin period of China: The Pre-Qin Period (2,100 B.C.–221 B.C.) is the period in Chinese history that comes before the Qin dynasty (221–206). It spans more than 1,800 years and includes three different historical periods, Xia (2070 B.C.–1600 B.C.), Shang (1600 B.C.–1046 B.C.), and Zhou dynasties (1046 B.C.–221 B.C.), during which the Xia-Shang dynasties' inscriptions on oracle bones and the Shang-Zhou dynasties' bronze wares are examples of the splendid civilization the intelligent and hardworking ancient Chinese people built during this time. These cultural relics later serve as historical markers for the ancient Chinese civilization (Retrieved on 14 Oct. 2010 from: <https://ezinearticles.com/?Pre-Qin-Period-in-History-of-China&id=7107054>).

**2** This is about correcting names for things so that they accurately reflect what they are, corresponding name with reality. A thing's qualities and relationships to other things are determined by its name which is what is used to refer to a thing. The term "reality" refers to the entity or object that its name denotes. An object's name should accurately reflect its nature. In actuality, however, name and reality seldom correspond. To address this issue, the name of a thing should not exceed the nature of the object; in a similar vein, the reality that is being referred to by the name must not extend beyond the scope that the term suggests. In order to preserve the social order established by names, the "rectification of names" plays a crucial role. Diverse schools of thought concur on the importance of correcting names, but they disagree on the precise meanings of the names to be corrected (Retrieved on 14 Oct. 2010 from: [https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu\\_show.aspx?shuyu\\_id=3526](https://www.chinesethought.cn/EN/shuyu_show.aspx?shuyu_id=3526)).

**3** The names that can be named are not unvarying names, and the way that may be described is not a constant. Heaven and Earth both originated from the Nameless; The Named is nothing more than the mother who raises the ten thousand different animals, each in accordance with its own type.

**4** It means that expecting the reality to correspond to the name. During the Warring States period, it is a school centered on debating the issue of names (calls *Ming* in Chinese philosophy) and reality (*Shi* in Chinese philosophy).

During this period, philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), John L. Austin (1911–1960), John R. Searle (1932–), H. Paul Grice (1913–1988), and Herbert Paul (1913–1988) used language analysis to address the philosophical issues. The second turn occurred in the first half of the twentieth century and is known as the “pragmatic turn”. Its occurrence is a consequence of linguistic philosophy. During this time, linguists used the concepts of Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle, Grice, Peirce, and Charles Morris (1901–1979) to tackle language issues, establishing the first real dialogue between language and philosophy. When cognitive science and cognitive psychology were employed to tackle pragmatic difficulties, pragmatics saw the other turn, being named “cognitive turn” as the third turn of language philosophy. The pragmatic turn is specifically influenced by the three dimensions of semiosis proposed by Morris in 1938, in which Morris’s semiotic thoughts run through the beginning of pragmatic turn to the ensuing cognitive turn in the late 1970s. Cognitive turn centered on Grice’s theory of meaning and communication, i.e., the speaker’s intention, which forms the basis of pragmatic concepts. We begin to sort out the historical vagaries of development of pragmatics from the perspectives of philosophy as its theoretical basis and semiotics as its research methodology, so as to identify the specific theoretical origin, conceptual intension, research objects and research methods of pragmatics.

## 2.1 Pragmatics with the linguistic theoretical foundations

It is widely accepted that the origin of the term “pragmatics” may be traced back to the three dimensions of semiosis established in Morris’s essay “Foundations of the theory of signs” in 1938, namely syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. To explain why “pragmatics” is categorized as a branch of linguistics, we must revisit the content, object, and scope of pragmatic study within the framework of its linguistic theory. It is notable that Peirce has long pointed out that the word “pragmatics” is derived from the Greek “*pragmatikós*”, signifying a clear and definite relationship between human purposes. The inclusion of Pragmatics within the field of linguistics is based on the ideas of linguistic framework, which derive from Saussure’s dualism of signs, i.e., the theory of the relationship between signifier and signified, with structuralism as its philosophical foundation. In linguistics, language has its own laws, and the relationship between signifier and signified is essentially arbitrary and not subject to human logic. In this sense, pragmatics is by definition the science of language use, which is confined to a narrower register in the category of language. However, Morris’s proposal of pragmatics as one of the dimensions of semiosis aims to establish an all-encompassing general semiotics as his initial purpose. Therefore,

pragmatics, as one of the dimensions of semiosis, is a general pragmatics relevant to the usage of all signs, not confined to the category of language as one of signs. We may refer to pragmatics grounded on linguistic theory as “linguistic pragmatics”. It is within the linguistic theoretical context that Pragmatics is thus considered a branch of linguistics in this appellation. From the perspective of disciplinary history, “Linguistic pragmatics” as a discipline not only carries the rational intension of a discipline, but also possesses the information of the historical development of the discipline (Jia 2019: 75), which has obvious language characteristics, and its research scope is naturally restricted to the level of speech acts. Linguistic pragmatics is concerned with the forms of language expression in relation to utterances in a specific context. Therefore, “linguistic pragmatics” belongs to the category of “descriptive pragmatics”, which does not include “formal pragmatics”, in terms of the research contents and objectives. The implications of the 1983 book *Pragmatics* by Levinson reinforce this assertion. The book presents the five components of pragmatic study, including “indexicals” or “deixis”, the distinction between which is that “indexicals” is a philosophical and logical notion, but “deixis” is a linguistic concept; Conversational implicature, which relates to illocutionary meaning; Presupposition, which indicates the common knowledge or *common ground* (Peirce’s term) between the speaker and the hearer in communication; Speech act, the fundamental unit of verbal communication, which is not words and phrases, but the performance of certain actions, including locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act; conversational structure, which refers to the structure of communication at the level of language users. The fundamental unit is turn-taking, which includes presequence, speech sequence, parenthesis sequence, and correction sequence, among others. From the analysis of the five aforementioned research aspects, it is easy to deduce that the contents of pragmatic research listed by Levinson are restricted to the verbal dimension, which belongs to the category of descriptive pragmatics, and that its research methodology is the code mode of descriptive pragmatics. Thus, the research content of “linguistic pragmatics” study is primarily “language meaning” research. Whether it’s conversational structure, presumption, deixis, or speech actions, it’s for the effectiveness of communication. In order to accomplish comprehension and transmission of meaning, utterance meaning is effectively conveyed in the turn-taking between the speaker and the hearer. The disciplinary intension of “linguistic pragmatics” in the linguistic dimension seems to be narrower than that of Morris’s proposal of “general pragmatics”. Taking the speech in a specific context as the research object, with a focus on the forms of language expression, is the tradition of the Saussurean school of linguistics, in terms of origin.

## 2.2 Morris's pragmatics as the real origin of pragmatics

If “linguistic pragmatics” is essentially concerned with the appropriateness of particular communicative actions and their utterance usage in context, then “pragmatics” as developed by Morris emphasizes a broader perspective on meaning. Morris focuses on the general meaning of semiotics, i.e., his research is not confined to the pragmatic research at the levels of speech and specific contexts. His “pragmatic” research focuses on the relationship between signs and sign users (Morris 1938: 6), indicating the general pragmatic system involving the signs used in the process of communication (verbal or nonverbal signs, tangible or intangible signs), with no distinctiveness of morphological structure (Jia 2019: 269). He prefers to characterize semiotics as an axiomatic system, which has an initial form of expression as “X accepts A”.

Linguistic pragmatics focuses on the content of descriptive pragmatics, i.e., the application of language in specific context, whereas Morris's pragmatics embraces the representation of the biological level of semiosis, i.e., the representation of the psychological, biological and sociological phenomena in the signifying process (Jia 2019: 80). Morris' pragmatics comprises the research contents and objects of formal pragmatics, descriptive pragmatics, and even applied pragmatics, and its research scope encompasses all references to “linguistic pragmatics”. Grounded on pragmatism as one of its philosophical fundamentals, Morris's pragmatics studies the relationship between signs and sign users. Therefore, pragmatics here belongs to Peircean tradition from the source.

Pragmatics is closely related to William James (1842–1910) and Charles Peirce (1839–1914). The former points out the practicability of pragmatics, while the latter regards pragmatics as an experimental, empirical, and purposeful thought under the influence of Kant's pragmatism (Jia 2019: 293). Pragmatics is also often associated with the Greek “*pragma*” with the meaning of “action”, “guidance”, or “utility” (Bublitz and Hübler 2007). Actually, pragmatics is inseparable from the core of pragmatism. Pragmatism, especially the theory of pragmaticism, could be regarded as the parental source of pragmatics. As early as the 1870s, when Peirce founded pragmatism, he made it abundantly apparent that pragmatism was a philosophy that investigated the relationship between people's thoughts and their language expressions in their acts. Therefore, pragmatic maxim established by Pierce is a method of “belief fixation” and “concepts clarification” per se. As a result of the intimate relationship between human behavior and the use of language, pragmatism is inescapable in the process of ideas clarification. Accordingly, pragmatism as a methodology consists of two primary theoretical components: one is the theory of “acts” and the other is the theory of “meaning”. Actually, it is inferred in the practical

study of pragmatism with two major problems: The first is the object in our minds, which is related to the external world by virtue of our acts and activities; the second is the relationship between the meaning of our ideas, signs and human minds, acts. The former emphasizes the relationship between acts, ideas, and the external world; The latter focuses on revealing the relationship between linguistic signs and the ideas and acts of their users, i.e., the linguistic semiotics of pragmatism (Pragmatics), short for “linguistic pragmatics” (Kha 2017: ii). Grounded on the logicism, pragmatism and behaviorism in Pierce’s thought, pragmatics focuses on the pragmatical dimension of the signifying process of signs. Consequently, pragmatics based on logic also analyzes human communicative language; its central focus is the human thinking concealed in the forms of language expression, with sentences serving as an example of exposing their true value. The formalized system pursued by pragmatics is excluded by linguists.

The proposal of Morris’s pragmatics is actually an extension of Pierce’s pragmatic thought. Morris’s semiotic trichotomy grounded on logic positivism, empiricism and pragmatism is inseparable from the influence of Pierce’s trichotomy of the theory of signs, but Pierce’s semiotic triads cover a broader field: (1) speculative (or formal) grammar, (2) logic, and (3) pure, formal, or speculative rhetoric. Speculative grammar is the predecessor of Morris’s syntactics, which studies the relationship among signs themselves and explores “the general conditions for signs being signs” (CP 1.444). It is “the general theory of the nature and meanings of signs, whether they be icons, indices, or symbols” (CP 1.191); Logical ontology is the second subfield of semiotics and the originator of Morris’s semantics, which includes linguistic semantics. According to Peirce, semantics is concerned with the connection between signs and their objects. “It is the science of what is quasi-necessarily true of the representamina of any scientific intelligence in order that they may hold good of any object, that is, may be true. Or say, it is the formal science of the conditions of the truth of representations” (CP 2.229). Speculative rhetoric is the antecedent of Morris’s pragmatics and the originator of linguistic pragmatics, which investigates the interaction between signs, sign-makers, and interpreters, as well as the effects produced by signs in semiosis with the man. “It is the doctrine of the general conditions of the reference of Symbols and other Signs to the Interpretants which they aim to determine [...]” (CP 2.93). Speculative rhetoric, also of the laws of the evolution of thought, is “[...] the study of the necessary conditions of the transmission of meaning by signs from mind to mind, and from one state of mind to another, [...]” (CP 1.444). Speculative rhetoric seems to cover more than Morris’ pragmatics. Firstly, it studies how signs “change from one state of mind to another”, which means that pragmatics as one of three branches of semiotics studies not only signs in communication, but also signs in mind that have not been communicated to any other interpreter. Secondly, speculative rhetoric is also regarded as “a rhetoric of fine art”,

“a rhetoric of practical persuasion”, “a rhetoric of science” (EP 2.329). Therefore, from the perspective of semiotics, the intension and nature of Peirce’s pragmatics seems to be broader than that of linguistic pragmatics, which is precisely why Morris has always been committed to the study of Semiotics: to determine the theories of “general semiotics and its branches”.

In this case, the conceptual properties and research scope of Peirce and Morris’ pragmatics exceed those of “linguistic pragmatics”. Morris and Peirce’s pragmatic philosophy tends to include the theoretical tendency of contemporary pragmatics that academic circles are concerned with. As semiotic theory is more abstract and less popular than linguistic theory, which makes the “linguistic pragmatics” more popular and acceptable, so that many scholars take for granted that Austin’s “pragmatic thought” with apparent linguistic characteristics is the origin of pragmatics, despite the fact that linguistic pragmatics is actually confined to the signs at the level of verbal communication. The pragmatics of Peirce and Morris is seldom concerned and investigated by semiotics specialists.

### 2.3 Peirce’s pragmatism as the parental source of pragmatics

The term pragmatics can be traced back to the work of American semiotician and behaviorist Charles Morris and his distinction between three dimensions of semiosis: Syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. Since pragmatics as a linguistic discipline is established, ordinary language philosophers and speech act theorists, such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, John L. Austin (1911–1960), John R. Searle (1932–), and H. Paul Grice (1913–1988) are considered to have laid the groundwork for pragmatics. This assertion, however, does not adequately address the philosophical foundations and parental source of pragmatics. Despite the fact that Peirce and Morris’s pragmatics overlaps with “linguistic pragmatics” in terms of the meaning and usage of speech acts and language signs, the name “pragmatics” has philosophical significance and semiotic characteristics. Pragmatists such as Austin, Searle, Grice, etc., define pragmatics primarily from the discipline of linguistics, whereas Peirce and Morris interpret pragmatics based on the philosophy of logic positivism, empiricism, and pragmatism, connecting closely with semiotics, as well as analytical philosophy as its development in the post-semiotic period. As such, the term “pragmatics” is conducive to highlight the significance of semiotic accomplishments of Peirce, James, Dewey, Mead, etc. In addition, as a particular semiotic academic term, “pragmatics” must set its own norms and rules. It is vital to differentiate between the terms “pragmatical” and “pragmatic” when discussing the science of the interaction between relevant signs and their interpreters. Consequently, the majority of symbols, like their interpreters, are composed of living organism, allowing pragmatics to



correctly represent the object. Pragmatics can represent the biological level of the semiosis, i.e., the psychological, biological and sociological phenomena in the function of sign reference. Pragmatics also has its pure theoretical and descriptive aspects. The former derives from the pragmatic feature of semiosis, whereas the latter relates to the use of language in certain contexts. The scope of “pragmatical” is, accordingly, broader than that of “pragmatics”, as Peirce’s pragmatism is more closely related to the category of “pragmatic”, as demonstrated by the definition of the relationship between signs and their sign users in Morris’s proposal of pragmatical dimension of semiosis. The acknowledged term “pragmatics” seems to be more congruent with Peirce’s pragmatism in terms of their research boundaries. For further expounding the distinction between “pragmatical” and “pragmatic”, it is necessary to make clear the substantial distinction between the two terms “pragmatism” and “pragmaticism”. The term “Pragmatical” is based on “pragmatism” of James et al., whereas the term “Pragmatic” is the product of “the ugly word pragmatism” created by Pierce, with pragmaticism as its foundation. Fundamentally, Peirce’s pragmaticism differs subtly from the pragmatism of James, Dewey, etc. As Pierce’s word ‘pragmatism’ is “[...] abused in the merciless way that words have to expect when they fall into literary clutches” (CP 5.414), it inevitably results in “the degradation of pragmatism to behaviorism” (Nadin 1993: 219). In 1905, Peirce replaced the word “pragmatism” with the neologism “pragmaticism”. Pierce commented that this is a word “ugly enough to be safe from being kidnapped” (CP 5.414). Although the appellation has been changed, its theoretical essence and intension have not fundamentally been changed, but their emphasis is different. The “pragmaticism” of Peirce emphasizes on the connection between human experience and action, from which it derives the meaning of action. At the semiotic dimension, it is advocated that the intension and extension of terms and concepts originate from the trichotomy of theory of signs: sign-object-interpretant (Jia 2019: 83). Albeit, the nature and intension of Peirce’s pragmatism are not substantially different from those of his replaced neologism “pragmaticism”, but they are different from the pragmatism developed by pragmatists as James and Dewey in the same period. James’s and others’ perspectives increasingly diverge from Pierce’s pragmatism, which is a one-sided misrepresentation of pragmatism as a way for people to achieve effects. The initiating intention of Pierce’s partial pragmatic thinking has been weakened and neglected, as seen by James’s “absolute empiricism” and Dewey’s “Instrumentalism”, which specifically diminish the notion of “effects” in Pierce’s pragmatic theory, i.e., the “meaning” in the Pragmatic Maxim. Therefore, pragmatism’s bounds are broader than those of Peirce’s pragmaticism. In conclusion, the word “pragmatical” corresponds to the “pragmatism” of James, Dewey, etc., while the research object, scope, and nature of pragmatics are consistent with those of Peirce’s pragmaticism and its Pragmatic Maxim, all of which are concerned with the study of “meaning” and “effect”.

### 3 Pragmatism, pragmaticism and pragmatics

James and Dewey have adopted and developed pragmatism since its founding by Peirce in the 1870s. The primary objective of pragmatism is not to solve the “meta-physical issue” pertaining to what the nature of the world is. It defends the philosophical concepts of the precedence of “action and effects” on the foundation of Peirce’s habitual thinking approach, which was cultivated and developed in the laboratory over a lengthy period of time. As a methodology, pragmatism is distinguished by the fact that the notions it generates and derives are grounded in ordinary life and behavior. Thereby, it can be generalized that pragmatism focuses on experience and behavior. This term, “pragmatism”, was invented by Peirce to describe his pragmatic philosophy, “a conception, that is, the rational purport of a word or other expression, lies exclusively in its conceivable bearing upon the conduct of life; so that, since obviously nothing that might not result from experiment can have any direct bearing upon conduct, if one can define accurately all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or denial of a concept could imply, one will have therein a complete definition of the concept, and there is absolutely nothing more in it” (CP 5.412). Later, James and Dewey adopted and extended Peirce’s pragmatism, but in the process, the pragmatism of James and others increasingly diverged from Peirce’s purport of pragmatism, resulting in the emergence of a diversified degree of pragmatism after Peirce (Murphy, 1990). The unification of belief, sign, and action, which is favorable to producing a pragmatic construction, is at the heart of Peirce’s pragmatism. Belief, sign, action, and logic produce a unity relationship in the execution of action and the use of language, which seems to be the precise reason why Peirce’s philosophy has such a clear blend of pragmatism and pragmatics. In Peirce’s 1905 essay “What Pragmatism Is”, many kinds of possible tendencies in the development of pragmatic thought are the very key to the characteristics of pragmatism itself and the study of the basic properties of Peirce’s pragmatism and pragmatic thought. In conclusion, this article suggests a range of complicated components inside the pragmatist thinking system and the potential for their differentiation. Peirce’s pragmatism is primarily comprised of three elements: First, the relationship between thought conceptions, beliefs, and actions; Second, the relationship between thought actions and linguistic symbols. Third is the transmission of thought and mediation of acts between the subjects of thinking and actions. Peirce’s “sign” (derived from Greek “sema”) may also be analyzed from three other perspectives: first, the relationship between signs themselves; second, the connection between signs and their objects; and third, the interaction between signs and their interpreters. Such a concept of signs inevitably results in the coincidence of pragmatism and pragmatic thought (Niu 2022: 85). However, James and others

believes that the category of Peirce's pragmatism is too restrictive, so they propose the revised pragmatic maxim, "[T]he effective meaning of any philosophical proposition can always be brought down to some particular consequence, in our future practical experience, whether active or passive; the point lying rather in the fact that the experience must be particular, than in the fact that it must be active" (James 1920: 412; cf. Jia 2019: 81). James broadens the scope of pragmatism and no longer confines it to the investigation of the meaning of ideas and propositions; instead, he applies it to all aspects of life. In reality, this has distinguished pragmaticism from pragmatism in terms of their intension and nature. The inherent meanings of "pragmatism" and "pragmaticism" in "pragmatics" seem to be awoken, and pragmatic thinking is thereby fragmented into different dimensions. Accordingly, there is a divergence of views between James' psychology-based study on meaning and Peirce's research on experimental thought and behavior habits. James and Dewey only focus on the meaning of ideas and propositions, advocate the truth, emphasize the "instrumentality" of thinking, and attach much importance to the effect of action, with no consideration of "language" as a mediator, which is what actually distinguishes Peirce's pragmatism from pragmaticism. Their conceptions of meaning have evolved into a marrow style of thinking and doing that is hungry for rapid success and instant gain. This is a methodology of utilitarian behavior with a strong purpose. This divergence of views is most evident in the evolution of James's "absolute empiricism" and Dewey's "instrumentalism".

It is important to emphasize the main differences between Peirce and James' contrasting approaches to pragmatism in order to comprehend what makes Peirce's pragmaticism so unique and compelling. Although the pragmatic maxim serves as a theory of *meaning* in Peirce's works, it is converted into a theory of *truth* by James's application. Here is where Peirce and James most diverge from one another. James' core philosophical convictions are exposed in his concept of pragmatism, which cannot be reduced to a single meaning criterion. Peirce and James differ on the use of a pragmatic approach in philosophy. They all have diverse beliefs. It is well-known that James's philosophy is anti-intellectual. He is very doubtful that a solely scientific and materialist view of the world and humanity's purpose will address all of humanity's most urgent problems. The pragmatism of James has characteristics with moral and theological views. For Peirce, especially in his later works, the pragmatic maxim is the essential premise of his philosophical worldview, and he views everything of philosophy as nested inside a scientific framework. Peirce believed that philosophy, and the pragmatic maxim in particular, should remain in close agreement with empirical study. The pragmatic maxim suggests that the best locations to look for answers to the big philosophical concerns it raises are in the fields of science and philosophy. James argues that pragmatism begins when our

scientific explanations begin to break apart, in contrast to Peirce's restriction of pragmatism to the world of scientific senses. As a result of their divergent philosophical and pragmatic worldviews, these two groups see pragmatism in quite different ways. For Peirce, pragmatism is an underlying concept of logic. The maxim is an analytical device that helps us crystallize our thoughts and be more exact in our reasoning. A philosophical stance, in James's view, pragmatism is a philosophical approach that shifts the focus away from science-based philosophy and instead considers the effects of one's beliefs and the choices people make. These divergent worldviews give rise to some further philosophical differences that are worth exploring. William James' brand of pragmatism emphasizes the need of considering how one's own belief affects one's own life and the lives of others. On the other hand, Peirce's pragmatism seems to take a more progressive attitude given its emphasis on experience and the effects it has on persons. Peirce finds "practical upshots" interesting not because of individual action and reaction but because of the formation of habit across people and communities.

According to the above analysis on the difference between pragmatism and pragmaticism, we can discover more clearly that the essence of pragmatics is more inclined to Peirce's pragmaticism, both of which focuses on the inquiry of *meaning*. "Pragmatism and pragmatics are, thus, not ordinary bed-fellows" (Kasher 1981: 53). In contrast to pragmatics, which is a subfield of the philosophico-linguistic inquiry for an explanation of natural language, pragmatism is an all-encompassing school of thought that takes on the classic philosophical issues from a new perspective. However, semiotics is typically assumed to provide the missing connection between pragmatism and pragmatics (Kasher 1981: 53). Pragmaticism is distinguished by its belief that meaning and action are intricately intertwined, such that the nature of meaning can be understood only by reference to action. This is because pragmatists think that actions are the best means through which to grasp the essence of meaning. The idea that actions have inherent significance lends credence to this school of reasoning (Morris 1970: 17). Therefore, pragmatics may be traced back to the study of behavioral semiotics. Pragmatics as an independent discipline, concerns with the relationship between verbal and non-verbal signs and their sign users in a specific context. Its major research objects are *meaning* and *context*. Albeit pragmatics is coined from pragmaticism, its major research scopes are narrower than those in pragmaticism which is the foundation of semiotics. Put in a nutshell, pragmaticism attaches importance to all the practical and potential effects of the objects as signs within the framework of the scientific experiments, which researches on all the significances of signs involving verbal and non-verbal signs as well as tangible and intangible signs.

## 4 The analysis of the semiotic framework of “pragmatics”

The origin, nature, intension and disciplinary classification of “Pragmatics” display semiotic features. The assertion that “Pragmatics” is synonymous with “pragmatical” narrows down the scope of research object, reference and intension of “pragmatics”, which is confined to the category of the research on language use. In truth, as early as 1983, the pragmatist Levinson proposed semiotics—how the study of the universality of signs is recognized as the standard explanation of the basis of Linguistic Pragmatics (Levinson 1983: 1–5). In contrast to modern Linguistic Pragmatics, Morris’s “semiotics of science” (1938[1970]: 6) is both wide and restricted in its study focus. This seems to be a paradoxical assertion, yet in terms of research scope, it is not contradictory within itself substantially. In the broad sense, the research scope of Morris’s “semiotics of science” is not confined to language communication alone, but also “Semiotic has for its goal a general theory of signs in all their forms and manifestations, whether in animals or men, whether normal or pathological, whether linguistic or nonlinguistic, whether personal or social. Semiotic is thus an interdisciplinary enterprise” (Morris 1964: 1). In other words, the senses of hearing, sight, smell, touch, and taste may serve as signs. Morris’ conception of pragmatics encompasses the language study of various disciplines, including “psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics, etc.” (Levinson 1983: 2). In a narrow sense, Morris investigates scientific semiotics within the context of biology-based behavioral science, particularly the paradigms of logic positivism, psychology, and social behaviorism (Morris 1946: 80). According to Levinson, “within analytical philosophy, the term pragmatics is subject to a successive narrowing of scope” (Levinson 1983: 2). As Bar-Hillel claims that pragmatics is concerned with the indexical representation of language usage (Bar-Hillel 1954: 359–374), Montague contends that pragmatics is founded on the context theory of truth condition, which is based on intensional logic (Montague 1970: 68–94). Carnap, influenced by these beliefs, restricts his pragmatic research to the logical analysis of language use (Carnap 1975). In conclusion, Peirce’s semiotics addresses pragmatic concepts in Linguistic Pragmatics, and Morris finally determines the concept, intension, nature and significance of pragmatics. Pragmatics as a term is coined with the reference to Peirce’s “pragmatism” and “pragmaticism”. The word “pragmatic” has a Latin root “pragma-” which means “act and do”. In the broad sense, pragmatics refers to the study of the meaning produced by human purposeful behavior. In terms of disciplinary history, Peirce’s “pragmaticism” is the parental source of “pragmatics”, that is, “pragmatics” is “pragmaticism” to some extent, but the scope covered by “pragmaticism” is broader and more general than “pragmatics”.

## 5 Meaning in pragmatics and semiotics

Peirce's semiotics is related to Linguistic Pragmatics, involving the relationship between semantics and pragmatics and their respective scopes, the distinctions between the speaker, the hearer and the meaning of the utterance, the deixis and indexicality in language, and the speech act theory. Even the idea of pragmatics has its origin in Peirce's works. In reality, pragmatics relies on the ideas of "meaning" and "context", which correspond to Peirce's conceptions of "interpretant" and "common ground", respectively. The meaning and reference of "pragmatics" are closely related to the meaning and indices of Peirce's semiotics. Comparing the nature and intension of pragmatics and semiotics with pragmaticism as one of its philosophical foundations, the research object, content, and boundary of "pragmatics" appear to be included in the study of semiotics, i.e., the scope of reference, research object, and nature of pragmatics are more in line with Peirce's "Pragmatic Maxim" and his study on "meaning" and "acts" from a semiotics perspective.

### 5.1 Pragmatics in Anglo-American analytical philosophy

According to pragmatics in Anglo-American analytical philosophy, pragmatics is derived from Morris's semiotic theory. Morris divides semiotics into three distinct branches: Syntactics is the study of the relationship between signs; Semantics studies the relationship between signs to their objects; Pragmatics studies the relations between signs and their sign users. In other words, pragmatics is a linguistic discipline, but has its origin of semiotic. More specifically, pragmatics is a linguistic discipline juxtaposed with language sciences like syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and sociolinguistics. *Context* and *meaning* are two essential ideas that are crucial to Pragmatics. Pragmatic study focuses on the meaning of the speaker's intention, i.e., the meaning not covered in semiotics. Pragmatics does not investigate the static meaning that only exists in words and phrases, but rather the context-specific meaning of actions. The two types of meaning distinguished by linguistics are sentence meaning and utterance meaning. Given that the same phrase might have distinct meanings or have different communication roles in different settings, utterance meaning is emphasized in pragmatic study. As such, the meaning in pragmatics as one of linguistic disciplines has its origin in Peirce's focus on meaning. One of the main purposes of pragmatism is to avoid of the dualism between thought and action (Colapietro 1992: 430). Peirce describes the specific application of this "Pragmatic Maxim" as "Pragmatism is the principle that every theoretical judgment expressible in a sentence in the indicative mood is a confused form of thought whose

only meaning, if it has any, lies in its tendency to enforce a corresponding practical maxim expressible as a conditional sentence having its apodosis in the imperative mood” (CP 5.18). Parret believes that pragmatism has three main implications for Linguistic Pragmatics, “the ‘pragmatic attitude’ is characterized by three features: meaning is context-bound, rationality is discourse-bound, signifying should be seen as understanding. Therefore, the ‘pragmatic attitude’ is inspired by pragmatism” (Parret 1983: 3). The enlightenment of Linguistic Pragmatics from the traditional thought of pragmatism is the importance of the effect of language on human behavior. The normalized communicative method is one of the foundations shared by Peirce’s semiotics and language pragmatics. Pierce’s contribution to Linguistic Pragmatics is often credited to Searle’s “expression principle”. Searle expresses that “this principle by saying that for any meaning X and any speaker S whenever S means (intends to convey, wishes to communicate in an utterance, etc.) X then it is possible that there is some expression E such that E is an exact expression of or formulation of X” (Searle 1969: 20). However, Peirce defines the “expression principle” more simply and earlier than Searle. i.e., “for thought and expression are really one” (CP 1.349). Searle points out that “meaning is more than a matter of intention, it is also at least sometimes a matter of convention” (Searle 1969: 45). Conversational implicature is thus grounded on the assumption of the difference between meaning and expression per se.

## 5.2 Peirce’s pragmatic theory of meaning

The meaning of a concept is not determined by the meaning it reflects, but by the effect it has on action, according to Peirce’s meaning theory of pragmatism. This concept is connected to Austin and Searle’s speech act theory since they proposed the speech act triads: Locutionary actions, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Perlocutionary acts are the effects caused by speech. Peirce’s theory of meaning is, therefore, pragmatic throughout (cf. Hilpinen 1995: 297). Meaning is the idea which the sign “attaches to its object” (CP 5.6), but not all the signs have meanings inherently and meanings are not inherent priori in the signs; meanings can only be revealed and produced in the process of semiosis (Pape 1996: 308). Words only have meaning “in so far as we are able to make use of it in communicating our knowledge to others and in getting at the knowledge that these others seek to communicate to us” (CP 8.176). Therefore, no “semantic” or “conventional” meaning can be found in Pierce’s assumptions. According to the Pragmatic Maxim, the meaning of an utterance is disclosed not only by its process of interpretation, but also by its actions and habits as its effects or consequences. In one of his late definitions, Peirce sums up “the meaning of any [assertion] is the meaning of the composite of all the propositions which that

[assertion] would under all circumstances empower the interpreter to scribe” (MS<sup>5</sup> 280; cf. Pietarinen 2005: 1769; cf. Nöth 2011: 188). As utterances have no intrinsic meaning apart from their employment in speech actions, Peirce makes no distinction between utterance and speaker meaning. In addition, he distinguishes many other kinds of meanings. Some aspects of meaning are connected to the object of the sign, as the sign presupposes the collateral knowledge of its object and the common ground of knowledge shared by the speaker and the listener. Other analysis of the kinds of meanings related to the interpretant and the effect of the meaning created by signs could be available in “Reflections on the role of the communicative sign in semeiotic” of Bergman (2000: 234 for both). In the above-discussed theory of interpretant, we find that the intentional interpretant as a term in Peirce’s semiotics corresponds to the speaker’s meaning in Linguistic Pragmatics, while the effective interpretant as a term corresponds to the Grice’s listener’s meaning in linguistic pragmatics; however, Peirce distinguishes other types of interpretants (cf. Johansen 2002: 48). His immediate interpretant which is the interpretant as it is revealed in the right understanding of the Sign itself, and is ordinarily called the meaning of the sign (CP 4.536), i.e., the meaning indicated by a sign that is interpreted before itself, is closer to Searle’s conventional meaning, but the interpretant is not always the meaning of a sign in the linguistic sense. Pierce also recognizes the potential of discrepancies between utterance and its meaning, as described in Linguistic Pragmatics, but his assertions about how to communicate meaning in the interaction between the speaker and the interpreter are based on alternative premises. According to Searle, meaning is not determined by rules, conventions and speaker’s intention, but by habits, common ground and the collateral experience of the objects of signs (1969: 43–45). Meaning is not only vague by exception, but it is essentially vague (Nöth and Santaella 2009, cf. Nöth 2011: 189). The meaning of language is vague to some extent because of the properties of generality and vagueness in words. Provided that the emotion, desire, and inner conflict are given consideration between the speaker and the listener while they are communicating, the meaning of words is to be much vaguer, specifically, more proliferated or more degenerative. For instance, emotions are never definite and distinct entities; they must be nebulous and can only be conveyed and explained via allusions, conjecture, intuition, and communicative negotiation. Therefore, “no communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, i.e., non-vague. [...] Wherever degree or any other possibility of continuous variation subsists, absolute precision is impossible. Much else must be vague, because no man’s interpretation of words is based on exactly the same experience as any other man’s. Even in our most intellectual conceptions, the more we strive to be precise, the more unattainable precision seems” (CP 5.506). Vagueness

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5 MS refers to Peirce (1979).



and generality are the two main causes of indeterminacy in conversation. This vagueness will not only lead to misunderstanding and even communicative failure. However, indeterminate signs are the source of creativity of interpreters and speakers. The interpreter must use his own imagination to determine the meaning symbolized by vague or general signs. This is also the source and drive of semiosis *ad infinitum* as well as the growth of signs. The nature of interpretant is the extension and effect of illocutionary force caused by linguistic vagueness in the linguistic pragmatic field, as the interpretation of the hearer is differentiated in accordance with his evaluation of the words sent by the speaker, which have been processed in his mind as a sign, so as to be further interpreted as a new sign of another round of semiosis, *ad infinitum*.

In addition, the hearer integrates the words as signs supplied by the speaker with his own unique knowledge system to discern the ambiguous meaning of words. The speaker who utilizes ambiguous signs might indicate the meaning of his utterances without being held accountable for his remarks. Therefore, ambiguity not only poses a threat to communication, but also challenges the imagination of the listener in order to comprehend the intention of speakers. As Nöth comments that “Peirce develops these ideas of the advantages and risks of taking and giving freedom of semantic choice with an example of a generality and one of referential vagueness” (Nöth 2011: 189).

### 5.3 The research contents in pragmatics

Both Linguistic Pragmatics and Peirce’s pragmatic theory are concerned with the investigation of meaning. The study contents of linguistic pragmatics are concentrated on meaning and context, which correlates precisely to Peirce’s theories on meaning and the notion of common ground or common knowledge, since context in Pragmatics includes both linguistic and extra-linguistic information. The subsets of linguistic knowledge are the mastery of language and the comprehension of language communication. Background knowledge (encyclopedic knowledge, social norms and conversation rules of a specific culture), situational knowledge (communication time, communication theme, communication formality, and the relationship between communication participants), and common knowledge are subcategories of extralinguistic knowledge. As Pietarinen argues that “many of the pragmatic notions that are commonly attributed to H. P. Grice, or are reported to be inspired by his work on pragmatics, such as assertion, conventional implicature, cooperation, common ground, common knowledge, presuppositions and conversational strategies, have their origins in C. S. Peirce’s theory of signs and his pragmatic logic and philosophy. Both Grice and Peirce rooted their theories in normative

rationality, anti-psychologism, and the relevance of assertions. With respect to the post-Gricean era of pragmatics, theories of relevance may be seen to have been geared, albeit unconsciously, upon Peirce's pragmatic agenda" (Pietarinen 2004:295). Accordingly, Pietarinen generalizes explicitly the study topics in modern pragmatics that derive from Peirce's theory of signs and his pragmatic concept.

The term "deixis" refers to the study of the relationship between language and context, including personal, temporal, and spatial deixis.

The concept of "conversational implicature" presents the Gricean cooperative principle and its four maxims. It assumes that the objective of human communication is to develop mutual understanding, which requires cooperation. Even though it violates the cooperative maxims outwardly, it still has the desire to cooperate. At this time, it is necessary to deduce the discourse violating the maxims according to the context so as to discover the meaning indicated in it.

As with conversational implicature, "Presupposition" is an activity of pragmatic inference that infers the prerequisites of utterances based on the meanings involved in the real language structures by examining logical concepts, semantics, and context, etc. The fundamental premise of speech act theory is that "words imply action". Speech Act Theory was established by Austin in 1962, and then developed by Searle, resulting in the formation of the triads of speech acts as "locutionary act", "illocutionary act" and "perlocutionary act". Speech Act Theory describes and evaluates the indirect speech acts in language communication by means of reasoning. Two dimensions are used in the examination of conversational structure: the local framework and the integral structure. The local framework consists of turn-taking and the composition of adjacent pairs, among other elements. The integral structure refers to the composition of a conversation activity, including the beginning, development, and ending of the conversation. The investigation of the integral structure is static. In the 1990s, conversational research transitioned into a dynamic state pertaining to the purposes of interlocutors, the devices and methods used to attain those purposes, and the interaction between the two interlocutors in conversational activities. Therefore, it is straightforward to conclude that "conversational implicature" and "linguistic conduct" are the primary subjects of investigation in Pragmatics based on Anglo-American analytic philosophy. The primary study method is logical reasoning, which is the individual behavior of language users, and the context of reasoning is the actual context of individuals.

## 5.4 Peirce's semiotics as the parental source of pragmatics

It is not by chance that pragmatics exists as a distinct field of study; rather, it is the history and evolution of its growth that propels pragmatics toward progressive

perfection and prosperity from the “wastebasket”, to which its theoretical origins make a vital contribution. Pragmatics has its parental source in Peirce’s semiotics grounded on pragmaticism. In his essay titled “Charles Sanders Peirce, Pathfinder in Linguistics”, Winfried Nöth, a famous semiotician and the author of the authority of semiotic works named *Handbook of Semiotics* (1990), wrote:

“Peirce’s contributions to linguistic pragmatics have so far remained largely unexplored (Pape 1996: 316). Long before Austin and Searle, Peirce studied speech acts and their consequences for the speaker and hearer (cf. Brock 1981; Martens 1981). He shows, e.g., in how far “taking an oath [...] is not mere saying, but is doing” (CP 5.546) and that “to assert a proposition is to make oneself responsible for it” (CP 5.543), whereas “conventional utterances, such as ‘I am perfectly delighted to see you’” are speech acts “upon whose falsehood no topics punishment at all is visited” (CP 5.546). The consequences of lying, denying, or judging, the strategies of questioning, commanding, or teaching, the pragmatic characteristics of fiction, and the strategies of dialogic communication are other topics of Peirce’s studies in the theory of speech acts which deserve closer linguistic study” (Hilpinen 1995; Thibaud 1997; Nöth 2000: 9–10).

In fact, with the exception of Peirce’s notion of the meaning of effects, the other three components are intimately connected to pragmatics. The first aspect pertains the *things as the effects of empiricism*; the starting point of Peirce’s theory is comparable to subjective empiricism. He denied the objective existence of the material world. He argues that “things are effects”, which, in essence, is identical to the classic subjective empiricism emphasizing the whole external universe and the human cognitive process. Peirce’s modes of signs significantly reflect his beliefs on objects and consequences. A sign consists of its representamen, object, and interpretant. In the process of human cognition, the representamen does not fully represent the meaning of the object (the objective world). The meaning is obtained by means of interpretation from human, i.e., the judgement of subjective experiences of human. This idea is also brought into play in the field of pragmatics, specifically, in the information communication; meaning is determined by the relationship between the sign and its users involving the addresser and addressee. Peirce provided a pragmatic explanation of the nature of meaning (cf. Gentry 1952; Alston 1956: 82–85) when he described the interpretant as “the proper significate outcome” or “effect of the sign” (CP 5.474–475), or as “something created in the Mind of the Interpreter” (CP 8.179). Peirce characterized the interpretant as a sign in line with his theory of thought as a sign and his view of interpretation as a process of semiosis. He defined interpretant that “A sign addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign” (CP 2.228). In other words, the meaning expressed by the addresser is the outcome of the interpretation (interpretant) of the addressee, and the logical reasoning of

the addresser's utterances from the addresser in a particular context, which is the most essential theoretical foundation of pragmatics. The second aspect is his *biological behaviorism*. Peirce equates human cognition and action with the instinctive activity of biological adaptation to the environment. The belief of human action is not built on the recognition of objective laws and inevitability; rather, it is only a biological instinct. Biological behaviorism is the most significant aspect of Morris's philosophy. He developed the idea of biological behaviorism, which is related to Austin and Searle's speech act theory per se since they promote "doing things with words" and think that using language is a kind of action and speech is acts. This concept is also related to the functionalism of language, as it is to perform a social function if the action is connected to human social life. The third aspect is on his *theory of modern logic*. In Peirce's view, Semiotics "extends logic". In a sense, logic is just an alias of semiotics. Sign activity (the process of sign generation) is the application of his logic. Peirce divides the signs into the firstness, the secondness and the thirdness. This kind of classification is actually the sign process (the process of sign generation). Each stage is a sign from representamen to object, and then to interpretant. The representamen signifies the object, but it does not fully represent the meaning of the object. This referential relationship has to be interpreted so as to determine the actual meaning indicated in the sign. Peirce's theory of infinite semiosis, in which an interpretant derives its meaning not from itself, but from what it is not, i.e., from another interpretant, and so on ad infinitum (CP 2.303). Thereby, interpretation is to make logical reasoning. As such, Peirce's notion of infinite semiosis is the methodology of pragmatics. Conversational implicature entails pragmatic inference on words that violate the cooperative principle based on a given context in order to determine their inferred meaning. As with conversational implicature, presupposition is also pragmatic inference. It deduces the preconditions of utterances based on the meaning of the actual language structure and logical concept, semantics and context. Speech acts theory explains the indirect speech acts that often occur in language communication. The main method of interpretation is also pragmatic reasoning. In general, Pragmatics studies the relationship between meaning and context. Meaning is the result of the addressee's logical reasoning of the addresser's words in accordance with a certain context.

## 6 Conclusion

Morris formalized the word pragmatics in his article "Foundations of Theory of Signs" (1938). Inspired by Peirce, he subdivided semiotic into the three fields of

syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics, the proposal of pragmatics being Morris's most significant contribution to the theory of semiotics. The term pragmatics is obviously proposed with the reference to Peirce's term "pragmatism" and "pragmaticism". Morris's triads of semiotics are actually the extension and specific application of Peirce's trichotomy of theory of signs. As a field of study, "pragmatics" adheres to Peirce's "pragmatic theory", which has a larger scope than linguistic pragmatic research. The intension, meaning, nature, and pertinent theories of pragmatics, such as speech act theory, cooperative principle, relevance theory, conversational implicature, face theory, reference, discourse analysis, and vagueness, which all reflect Peirce's theories of semiotics and pragmaticism. The primary research objective of pragmatics is consistent with that of Peirce's pragmaticism, both of which take the research on "meaning" as their research focus. Therefore, pragmatics is the embodiment of the specific application of Peirce's semiotics and pragmaticism. Mr. Hu Zhuanglin argues that the theoretical framework of contemporary pragmatic is derived from Peirce's semiotics with the foundation of his pragmaticism. He argues that "Pragmatics is the application of pragmatics in signs in the field of linguistics" (Hu 2013: 6–10). The "pragmatics" referred to by Mr. Hu in his essay really refers to Morris's "pragmatics", and Morris's semiotics, which was heavily inspired by Peirce, is not confined to language signs but also includes verbal and nonverbal signals, animal and biological signs, etc.

In sum, pragmatics originates from the semiotics of Peirce and Morris. In his theory of signs, Peirce's "interpretant" relates to pragmatics. It is consistent with Morris's suggestion that pragmatics is one of the three semiotic dimensions that investigates the relationship between signs and sign users. Signs communicate their meaning via the interpretation of their users. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics. Pragmatism, or pragmaticism, is the philosophical cornerstone of pragmatics. Its primary methodology is based on logical reasoning. It investigates the relationship between meaning and context, specifically the illocutionary meaning of speech actions that are excluded in semantics. The study of language pragmatics focuses on dynamic speech acts in which the meaning of language is directly associated with human intention. Therefore, pragmatics offers opportunity for cognitive and dynamic growth. Pragmatics has the trend of scientism of modern western philosophy and Peirce's semiotic system of scientific tendency. The sign users that pragmatics refers to is biological individuals, not the members in the society; the context that pragmatics refers to is an actual context of the sign users, not the social and cultural context. Thereby, the application of Peirce and Morris's pragmatic theory is greatly confined to the field of humanities and social sciences. It is the so-called "pragmatics in the broad sense advocated by the European continent" that remedies this defect, which attempts to expand the research scope of pragmatics to the field of

social culture. Nonetheless, this expansion of the research scope is contradictory to the original objective of pragmatics, divorced from the tradition of pragmatics, and incapable of using the fundamental theories and methodologies of pragmatics. Its study focus encompasses “language in use” in its entirety. In fact, this is what Saussure called the “parole” category. Peirce’s pragmatic theory refers to a broader dimension beyond the social and cultural context, which is why scholars take it as a given that pragmatics belongs to the linguistic field and prefer to accept and comprehend pragmatics from the perspective of Saussure’s tradition, as Peirce’s pragmatic theory refers to a broader dimension. In doing so, pragmatics will be inevitably overlapped and confused with sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and many other linguistic disciplines, which is not conducive to the research and development of linguistic disciplines. The difficulty of pragmatic research lies not only in “pragmatism (here, referring to pragmatics) has a variety of interpretations”, but also in “the relationship between its historical views and methodology”, i.e., the methodology of pragmatics advocated by some scholars is inconsistent with that of traditional pragmatics. Substantially, pragmatics and cognitive linguistics are homologous, as they both are the exertion of Peirce’s theory of “interpretant”. In the three correlates of Peirce’s theory of signs, the representamen (sign) represents its object, but it cannot completely represent the meaning of the object. The representamen must be interpreted by sign users, i.e., after the interpretant has been formed in order to convey the whole meaning. In other words, in the cognitive process of sign use by humans, the representamen (sign) cannot completely represent the meaning of its object (objective reality); the sign user’s interpretation is required to produce the full meaning. Therefore, different people interpret the same sign differently, which is the theoretical foundation of cognitive linguistics. When this concept is used to information transmission, the meaning stated by the speaker must also be interpreted by the hearer in light of his context at a given moment in order to comprehend the speaker’s true intention, which is the theoretical basis of pragmatics. Incorporating the two disciplines for considerations may be conducive to understanding the research scope of the two disciplines. The natural combination of semiotics and pragmaticism enables us analyze “pragmatics” from the perspective of semiotics, and clarify the historical and theoretical origin of “pragmatics” as an independent discipline, from “wastebasket” to the prosperity of today, so as to be conducive to predicting its future trend of development accurately. In conclusion, the recognition of the nature, scope, and methods of pragmatics from the perspectives of the philosophical foundation of pragmatics and the source of semiotics could help maximize the exercise of its benefits and the avoidance of diversions, thereby resolving the problem that pragmatics cannot determine its definition and research scope.

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