Semiotic Analysis of Pragmatics

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ABSTRACT. *At present, Pragmatics has become an active and independent subject, but some serious problems are still existed in its development: the definition and category of Pragmatics are still uncertain. This paper attempts to analyze Pragmatics from the perspective of linguistic philosophy and Semiotics, and holds that pragmatics derives from the Semiotics of Peirce and Morris. It plays and develops the role of "interpretant" in Peirce's Semiotics, and more obviously, it is one of the three branches of Semiotics proposed by Morris. It studies the relationship between symbols and their users. The meaning of symbol expression is the results of various interpretations from different users. The philosophical basis of pragmatics is Peirce's pragmatism, or pragmaticism, which studies the relationship between meaning and context, i.e. , the illocutionary meaning being excluded in the scope of Semantics. The main methodology of Pragmatics is logical reasoning.*

KEYWORDS: *Pragmatics, Semiotics, Pragmatism, Reasoning*

1. Introduction

In the past 20 years, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, Pragmatics has been developed rapidly, and now it has become an independent language discipline with great vitality. However, some serious problems are still existed in the development of this discipline.So far, the definition and category of Pragmatics are still uncertain.

In his introduction to Pragmatics written by Levinson, Mr. He Zhaoxiong pointed out that:

"There are four sections in this chapter involving the research on the category of Pragmatics, of which the second section is entitled "The Definition of Pragmatics". Readers thought that they could find a definition of Pragmatics here, but at the beginning of this section, Levinson said that 'such a definition of Pragmatics is not easy to be defined. We could discuss a series of possible existed definitions of Pragmatics, each of which at most outlines the possible research scope in this field'. We are a little disappointed to read it here. Until the end of this chapter, Levinson did not give a definition of pragmatics, he just discussed a series of

Possible definitions of Pragmatics."(Levinson, 2001, F25)

The author of this thesis turned to the original work, which is 53 pages long, and even did not discover the definition of pragmatics defined by Levinson.

In addition, at the beginning of the paper entitled "Pragmatics in the Semiotic Frame", it is said at the beginning of the paper:

Much has been written about the various meanings of the term *pragmatism* (the author thought that the *pragmatism* here refers to exactly *Pragmatics* in terms of the whole paper), and there is reason to believe that more pragmatic concepts will be advanced and applied in years to come. While some commend the multi-dimensionality of the term, other complain that the name itself is far from uniformly used. (As a matter of fact, it is frequently abused.) Peirce's well-known re-baptism of the term-as the indeed ugly *pragmaticism* was definitely based on arguments of the ethics of terminology pertinent to his philosophy. But it did not prevent new and subtler ways of misunderstanding and /or manipulating a concept that introduced one of the most influential and challenging doctrines of our times. This makes the attempt to examine pragmatism in the semiotic framework (its *proper* framework), if not easy, at least all the more necessary.

The reader must have already noticed a first difficulty peculiar to this behavior: Which pragmatism, i.e., which species of this strange philosophical (if it is philosophical or only philosophical) movement/doctrine should we consider? And if the answer is "*all*" (which is easier said than done), then to which effect, since merely distinguishing within the set of various meanings and uses of the term constitutes a subject in itself (on which a number of books and studies have already been written). A second difficulty concerns the relation between the historical perspective and the methodological aspects of the subject.

The author of this paper holds the same intention and viewpoints with the description being stated above. The author tries to analyze Pragmatics from the perspective of Semiotics and philosophy, and make clear the philosophical basis, nature, category and method of Pragmatics. Please criticize and correct the inappropriateness without hesitance.

2. The Problems of Pragmatics and the Delimitation of Its Research Scope At Home and Abroad

At present, two types of definitions of Pragmatics and its research scope are advocated in western countries: one is the relatively narrow and specific definition of British and American Analytical Philosophy School, and the other is the relatively broad definition of European and American Continental School. Such works at home and abroad as *Pragmatics* written by Stephen C. Levinson (2001), *Principles of Pragmatics* by Leech (1983), *Pragmatics* by Jean Stilwell Peccei (2000), and *An Introduction to Pragmatics* by He Ziran (1988), *A Survey of Pragmatics* by He Zhaoxiong (1989) and *Pragmatics: Theories and Applications* by Jiang Wangqi (2000) all belong to the former. Whereas, such works as

Understanding Pragmatics by Jef Verschueren (2000), *Pragmatics: An Introduction* by Jacob Mey (2001) are the representatives of the latter.

2.1 The Definition of Analytic Philosophy in the United States and Britain

According to the Pragmatics of Analytic Philosophy, Pragmatics originates from the semiotic theory of Morris. Morris divides semiotics into three parts: Syntactics, studying the sign relationship between signifier and signifier; Semantics, exploring the sign relationship between signifier and signified; Pragmatics, probing the relationship between sign and its users. In other words, Pragmatics is a subject of linguistics. To be more specific, Pragmatics is a linguistic subject parallel to the subjects of Syntactics, Semantics, Phonetics, Phonology, Sociolinguistics, etc.

The two basic concepts in the research on Pragmatics are meaning and context.

The meaning of Pragmatics research is a kind of meaning that reflects the purposes and intentions of the speakers, which is not included in Semantics. Pragmatics does not study the static meaning existed and presented in words and sentences, but the meaning embodied in actions in a certain context. In linguistic literature, two kinds of meaning are distinguished: sentence meaning and utterance meaning. Pragmatics studies the latter rather than the former. The same sentence can express different meanings or have different communicative functions in different contexts.

Context includes linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge. Linguistic knowledge is divided into two types of the mastery of language application and the understanding of language communication in context. Non-linguistic knowledge are, however, subdivided into three dimensions of background knowledge involving encyclopedic knowledge, social norms of specific culture and conversational rules; situational knowledge pertaining to communicative time, place, communicative theme, communication formality, and the relationship between communicative participants; and mutual knowledge.

Pragmatics is focusing on the researches of deixis, presupposition, conversational implicature, speech act and conversational structure.

"Deixis" studies the relationship between language and context, including personal deixis, temporal deixis and spatial deixis.

"Conversational implicature" introduces Gricean Cooperative Principle and its four subordinate principles. It holds the assumption that human communication is to achieve the purpose of mutual understanding, which needs to be cooperated. Even if it violates the cooperative norms on the surface, it still has the desire to cooperate. At this time, it is necessary to infer the discourse violating the norms according to the context so as to find out the meaning indicated in it.

Like conversational implicature, "Presupposition" is an action of pragmatic inference, which infers the prerequisites of utterances on the foundation of

meanings being involved in the actual speech structures through the way of analyzing logical concepts, semantics, and context, etc.

The basic conception of Speech Act Theory depends on the notion of "speech means to action". Speech Act Theory was initiated by Austin in 1962, and then developed by Searl, which finally the three models of speech act were put forward as "locutionary act", "illocutionary act" and "perlocutionary act". Speech Act Theory explains and interprets the indirect speech acts in language communication. The main method of interpretation is also reasoning.

The analysis of conversational structure is conducted at two dimensions: one is the local framework, the other is the integral structure. The local framework includes the tum-taking and the composition of adjacent pairs, etc. The integral structure refers to the composition of a conversation activity involving how conversation starts, develops, and ends. The conversational analysis in the integral structure being stated above is a static research. In the 1990s, conversational research began to enter into a dynamic state, which pertains to the purposes of conversational participants, the devices and strategies being adopted to achieve the purpose, and the interaction between the two interlocutors in conversational activities. (The introduction stated above to pragmatics is mainly based on the introduction written by He Zhaoxiong for *Pragmatics* written by Stephen C. Leveinson (2001).

It can be observed from the introduction of Pragmatics researches stated above that the main objects of researches on Pragmatics based on Analytic Philosophy in Britain and America are "conversational implicature" and "linguistic behavior". The main method of research is logical reasoning, which is the individual behavior of language users, and the context of reasoning is the actual context of individuals.

2.2 A Broad Pragmatic Definition of Continental Europe

Pragmatics in Continental Europe covers a wide range, for example:

In his book of *Understanding Pragmatics*, Jef Verchueren (2000) first roughly defined pragmatics as "the knowledge of language use", and futher divided research of pragmatics into two parts. The first part is linguistics of language resources with language itself as the research object, and the second part is interdisciplinary fields of investigation. The former contains phonology, phonics, lexicology, syntax, and semantics, the latter includes neurolinguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, human linguistics, etc. The conclusion of the book is that pragmatics does not constitute a new component of general linguistics, nor a new branch of Applied Linguistics. In fact, it provides a new perspective for us to reexamine all levels of language from the perspective of language use. The book also points out that studying language from this perspective of language use can reveal the inextricable connection between language and human life, as the use of language is a kind of social behavior. In this sense, pragmatics is a bridge connecting general linguistics, applied linguistics and other humanities and social science. In that, Verschueren redefines pragmatics as the science of "studying

language phenomena and behaviors from the perspective of cognition, society and culture". It focuses on how language plays a role in human life. (the stated above could be found in the introduction comments written by LAN Chun for *Understanding Pragmatics* by Lean Stilwell Peccei (2000).

Jacob Mey's works of *Pragmatics: An Introduction* (2001) describes a very broad picture of pragmatics. The book is divided into three parts. The first part introduces some basic concepts, reviews the history of researches on pragmatics, and points out the general scope of pragmatics development. The second part focuses on micro pragmatics, mainly pertaining to reference and anaphora, speech act and speech act verbs. The third part extends to macro pragmatics, involving discourse analysis, meta pragmatics and social pragmatics (Jacob Mey, 2001).

3. Semiotic Analysis of Pragmatics

In the book of *An Introduction to General Linguistics*, Saussure (points out that "the reason why I can find a place in science for linguistics is that I have connected linguistics with semiotics." In other words, semiotics makes linguistics a science. In addition, pragmatics is directly related to semiotics, which comes from semiotics. Therefore, the analysis of pragmatics from perspective of semiotics can clarify the contents being involved in pragmatics scientifically and basically so as to elaborate its philosophical basis, nature, category and method.

It is a well-known fact that pragmatics originates from the three branches of Morris's Semiotics. However, the author has not noticed that any further analysis and research has even been conducted on this basis of Morris's semiotics, let alone the analysis of pragmatics from Peirce's Semiotic Theory which is generally regarded as the source and foundation of Morris's semiotics. The author took the liberty to do this matter, if any the improper conceptions and contents discussed in this paper are existed, readers could criticize to correct at your hearts content.

In fact, some foreign scholars have directly connected pragmatics with pragmatism proposed and advocated by Peirce.

In an article entitled "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, p.316). Long before Austin and Searle, Peirce studied speech acts and their consequences for the speaker and listener (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 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).

Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen wrote an article entitled "Grice in the Wake of Peirce", in which he wrote the summary as follows:

I argue 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 theirtheories 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. (Ahti-Veikko Pietarinen, 2004, p.295)

What's more, a passage in the book entitled "A New Course of Modern Western Philosophy" written by Xia Jisong (1999) is described as follows:

Such theories as Intersubjectivity proposed by Wittgenstein in his later stage, and his Impossibility on Private Language as well as the theory of Peirce referring to "the meaning of language lies in the *effect* ", and his concept of "sign interpretation community" point out the direction for the development of pragmatics.(Xia Jisong 1999,p.609)

4.1 Peirce's Pragmatism and Semiotics

Peirce's pragmatism is also called pragmaticism. The reason why he adopted the name of pragmaticism is that, first, it is different from other philosophical thoughts named pragmatism, and second, it emphasizes the *effect* more.

The author assumes that the following four points in Pierce's pragmatism philosophy and semiotics are directly related to pragmatics.

4.1.1 Objects: the Effect of Experience

The starting point of Pierce's theory is similar to subjective empiricism. He denied the objective existence of the material world. He believes that "the essence of objects is *effect*, of which nature is just the same with that in the traditional subjective empiricism, focusing on empiricism of the whole objective world and individual cognitive process.

The author thinks that Peirce's view is prominently reflected in his sign models: sign is composed of representamen, object and interpretant. In the process of human cognition, representemen does not fully represent the meaning of object (the objective world), and the meaning must be interpreted by human beings, put it another way, the meaning of the object is judged and evaluated by human subjective experience. This viewpoint has been brought into play and exercise in Pragmatics: in the process of information communication, meaning is the

relationship between the sign and its users (the addresser and the addressee), in other words, the meaning expressed by the speaker is the result of the interpretation (interpretant) of the receiver, and the results of the logical reasoning of the speaker's utterances in a certain context, which may be the most fundamental theoretical basis of pragmatics.

4.1.2 Pierce's View of Biological Behaviorism

Peirce equates human cognitive activities with the instinct of biological adaptation to environment. Human action belief is not built on the understanding and knowledge of objective laws and inevitability, it is just a biological instinct. Morris's thought of biological behaviorism is more prominent. He created the theory of biological behaviorism.

The author believes that Morris's viewpoints on biological behaviorism is related to Speech Act theories proposed and developed by Austin and Searl, because they advocate "doing things with words" and claim that the application of language is doing one thing and speech is act, which is also relevant with the functionalist theory of language, as if what we do is a matter related to human social life, which is regarded as the exercise of a social function.

4.1.3 Significance of Effect

Peirce put forward the theory of Pragmatism: the meaning of a concept is not determined by the meaning it reflects, but by the effect of the action it causes.

The author believes that conception of pragmatism is pertaining to Speech Act Theories proposed by Austin and Searl, because they put forward three models of speech acts: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Perlocutionary act is the *effect* caused by speech.

4.1.4 The Theory of Modern Logic

In viewpoints of Peirce, Semiotics "extends logics", in a sense, logics is just another name of semiotics. Sign activity is the application of logics. He divided the signs into the firstness, the secondness and the thirdness. This kind of classification is actually the process of sign activity (the process of sign generation). Each stage is a sign from representamen to object, and futher to interpretation. The representamen denotes to the object, but it does not fully represent the meaning of the object. This designative relationship has to be interpreted so as to get the real meaning being indicated in the sign, which is called interpretant generation. Interpretant again could be interpreted in a continuous chain by different people. Interpretation is to make logical reasoning. (Guo Hong, 2004)

The author believes that this viewpoints hold expressed by Peirce is exact the methodology of Pragmatics. As stated above, conversational implicature refers to the pragmatic inference of utterances violating the Cooperative Principle according to the context so as to probe the implied meaning. Presupposition, like

conversational implicature, is also pragmatic inference, which is based on the meaning of the actual linguistic structure and then infers the presuppositions of discourse by the analysis and reasoning of logical concepts, semantics, and context, etc. Linguistic Speech Acts explains the indirect speech acts which often appears in language communication. The main method of the explanation is pragmatic reasoning. Generally speaking, pragmatics studies the relationship between meaning and context. Meaning is the result of the logical reasoning of utterances conducted by addressers in a certain context. (Xia Jisong, 1999)

What's more, the author would like to probe pragmatics from two basic principles of Pragmatics: Conversational Implicature and the philosophical origin of Speech Acts.

From the perspective of history of modern western philosophy, origin of Pragmatics could be traced: the philosophy and theory of pragmatics ascend to the School of Ordinary Language Philosophy. The philosophical conceptions in Ordinary Language Philosophy, and Pragmatism, Logical Positivism and Positivism belong to the scientific trend of thought in the history of western philosophy. The semiotics of Peirce and Morris as well as the pragmatics of Austin, Grice and Searl are all given to birth in this trend of thought, consequently, their philosophical and theoretical foundations come down in one continuous line.

Both logical positivism and Ordinary Language Philosophy are subordinate to new positivism. They all assert that comments on the problems that are beyond the scope of experiences are "metaphysics", and they all advocate the analysis of language. However, logical positivism emphasize on the philosophy of formal language or artificial language, which proclaims that abandoning ordinary language and creating an ideal artificial language or formal language according to mathematical logics. However, many insurmountable difficulties in theory basis are met in this process of constructure. Ordinary Language Philosophy is a kind of positivist philosophy of language created to overcome these difficulties. It is called the Ordinary Language Philosophy because it claims that ordinary language is perfect, and the root of all kinds of metaphysical arguments and cognitive errors lies not in language itself, but in people's wrong and abuse of language without correct understanding and using of the rules or methods of ordinary language (ibid., p. 207).

Wittgenstein (later period) is recognized as the founder of this School of Orinary Language Philospophy. Austin is another representative of this school. The core theories and thoughts of these two representatives are introduced analyzed as the following.

Wittgenstein advocates that meaning is not concerned as the key, but only focus on the use. He said that "one of the roots causes of the philosophical confusion we face is that we need to find a corresponding object for nouns". What should be raised is not "what the meaning of words is", but "what the purpose of words is". This is because only when they are combined and used in a sentence can they have certain meaning, and a word can also have different meanings in different sentence combinations. He believes that language is inextricably linked

with human activities and cannot be interpreted in an abstract way. Language is not the product of static logical structure, but an activity in human life. He compared language to a game. He said "I call the combination of speech and act as language games", He claims that the game must have rules that people who play games together abide by. The same is true of language. It also has rules that speakers abide by. The meaning of the same words and phrases is different in different uses. Language is a type of tool, which is endowed with meaning in the process of language application, whereas, studying the meaning of language and its words in isolation and statics without connecting with ordinary language happened every day is to look for its counterpart in vain (ibid., pp. 209-213). Austin opposes the view of psychologism and holds that the same sentence can have different or even completely opposite meanings in different contexts. Therefore, the focus of interpretation should be shifted from the speaker's inner intention to speech act, i.e., study meaning from perspective of speech acts. His theory is the development of Wittgenstein's view that language is an activity or an action. His Speech Act Theory emphasizes that speech is act and speaking is doing. Speaking and doing are not opposite to each other, because stating facts by language is naturally a kind of statement or descriptive action. This theory extends to the scope of linguistic research and combines linguistics with life practice, which has a great influence on later philosophy of language. (ibid., pp. 207-212)

From the discussion being stated above, we have observed the rudiments of pragmatics.

5. Conclusion

Pragmatics derives from Semiotics of pierce and Morris. It studies the relationship between signs and their users. The meaning expressed by signs is the result of interpretation from users. Pragmatics is a linguistic discipline. The philosophical basis of pragmatics is pragmatism philosophy, or philosophy of pragmaticism. Its main methodology is logical reasoning. The research object of its study is the relationship between meaning and context, i.e., to study the illocutionary meaning of speech acts not being involved in semantics. It refers to language not static one, but speech act, a king of dynamic language. The meaning of language is closely related to human intention. Therefore, pragmatics has room to be developed in the direction of dynamics and cognition. But it also has its limitations. Pragmatics is subordinate to the scientific trend of western modern philosophy and of Peirce's semiotic system with the scientific tendency. It designates to the people who use language as living beings, not social people. It refers to the actual context of the people who use language, not social and cultural context. Therefore, the application of this theory in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences is greatly restricted. In my opinion, it is the exact reason that the so-called "pragmatics in the broad sense of Continental Europe" appears to eke out this defect, which attempts to expand the scope of researches on pragmatics to the field of social culture. However, it is against the original intention of pragmatics and breaks away from the tradition of pragmatics, as this Continental European Pragmatics cannot apply the fundamental

theories and methods, of which research scope has reached the width of "language in use". In fact, this is what Saussure called "parole". 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.

In a word, the recognition of the nature, scope and method of pragmatics may be discovered from the philosophical basis and semiotic source of pragmatics, so as to give full play to its advantages to the greatest extent, and at the same time, scholars should not economize on extraneous branches of pragmatic research, so that pragmatics cannot be determined its definition and research scope.

Acknowledgments

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