（講　演）

What is Pragmatics Like?

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1. The aim of my talk is to give a general idea of what we linguists do in the field of pragmatics. Pragmatics is one of the major areas of linguistics and is closely associated with such things as the speaker and the addressee, the interpersonal relationship between speaker and addressee, and the context of situation, the last of which means what is going on, both linguistically and non-linguistically, in the situation of utterance.

Probably the best way to start my talk is to give some concrete examples to demonstrate what sorts of things pragmatists are interested in and how they go about handling them. Now, as I am sure many of you know, English has a construction called tag questions. By tag questions, I mean sentences like the following:

(1) John is angry, isn't he?

(2) John isn't angry, is he?

Tag questions of this type are sometimes called *contrasting* tags simply because, as is evident from (1), the tag clause, or the tag for short, is in the negative when the main clause is positive, and when the main clause is negative as in (2) the tag is in the positive. You can see there is such a marked contrast in polarity, i.e. in terms of being affirmaive or negative, between the main clause and the tag. Incidentally, there is one other type of tag question in English where both the main clause and the tag are in the positive, as in:

(3) (So) John is angry, (oh) is he?

Tag questions like (3) are 'echoic' in that the main clause, i.e. *John is angry*, normally represents what the speaker of (3) has echoed, i.e. repeated, or has inferred from what the addressee said in previous discourse. In this respect, (3) is subtly but crucially different from tag questions like (1).

My primary interest here is in tag questions of the first type with such variation in the tag as illustrated in (4):

(4) John is angry, *aren't you?*

Now a tag question such as (4) is obviously an unusual one because there is no usual correspondence in person between the subject of the main clause and that of the tag. (4) is about the person named *John*, but for some reason it has the second-person pronoun *you* in the tag instead of the usual third-person pronoun *he*. Sentences like (4), however, can and do in fact occur in a conversational situation. The question is what sort of situation it is, and how it differs from the situation where tag questions such as (1) and (2) are uttered.

With this question in mind, let us examine (4) a little more closely. Syntactically, (4) follows the rules of English tag questions fairly strictly. More specifically, since the main clause of (4), i.e. *John is angry*, is in the positive, the tag is negative, as in *aren't you,* as is the case with (1). Also, (4) has the same operator, i.e. the verb *be* here, both in the main clause and the tag, and in the same tense, again as in (1). Furthermore, just as *John* in (1) refers to the same person as the pronoun *he* in the tag, so does *John* in (4) refer to the same person as the pronoun *you*. This last point is especially important in clarifying what is going on in (4).

Now can you imagine what sort of situation it has to be where the speaker is talking about a specific person, referring to him first by his name *John*, and then by the pronoun *you*, instead of the more usual *he*? I am sure many of you have already realized what is going on in (4). Right, here the speaker is talking to two people: the speaker starts talking to one of them about John, and then immediately after he has said *John is angry*, he turns to the other person—and this second person has got to be John—and confirms John himself whether what the speaker has just said is really true. In other words, at least three people are involved in the context of (4), the speaker, the first addressee, and the second addressee, the last of whom, as I have said, is John himself. In short, there is a change of addressee in (4): the speaker changes his addressee in the middle of his utterance. I am sure you can easily imagine this sort of thing can happen quite frequently during the course of our daily conversation. This is just one of the many examples that illustrate that more than just syntactic or grammatical considerations is sometimes necessary in explaining a linguistic phenomenon.

2. I will give you another example where some deeper understanding of language is required in the same sense. In narrative discourse, particularly in novels, though the phenomenon is not restricted to novels alone, the temporal adverb *now*, which obviously refers to the present time is used along with the past tense. Let us consider the following example for the moment:

(5) John was sad *now*.

Now, if you stop and think about it, this is indeed a strange sentence: Is the speaker, or rather the writer, of (5) talking about the present time, i.e. *now*, or is he/she instead talking about a past state of affairs, i.e. *John was sad*? The question for us here is this: How is it possible in (5) for the writer to describe the state of affairs at hand in the past tense, as in *John was sad*, while simultaneously viewing that same situation as belonging to the present time as indicated by *now*? Grammarians often say things like: 'In (5) the word *now* is used in order to describe the past situation vividly, to make the reader feel as if he were there at that very scene with the character *John*.' That is all very well and good, but for us linguists something more seems to be involved in (5); and that something will perhaps give us an insight into the nature of narrating stories.

Consider a couple more examples of *now*:

(6) Not yet…not yet…*NOW!*

(7) I am not available right *now*. (on telephone answering machine)

(6) is uttered in a situation where both the speaker and the addressee(s) are closely observing something, and the word *now* indicates the precise moment at which some particular action, perhaps jointly by the speaker and the addressee, is to take place. What is especially interesting about (6) is that here the attention of the speaker and that of the addressee have converged so much that as far as their perception of time is concerned both the speaker and the addressee are exactly alike and have become virtually as one. The word *now*, it appears, is a linguistic indicator signifying that such convergence has taken place between participants in an interaction.

Now consider (7). This is a recorded message you hear on a telephone answering machine. Evidently the *now* here does not refer to the time at which the speaker utters (7), i.e. the time at which the message is recorded, but it refers to the time at which the caller, i.e. the addressee of (7), actually hears the message on the answering machine. In our terms, the *now* in (7) refers to the time when the speaker-addressee relationship has been established through the caller's interpreting the recorded message as intended. Thus we can say that when there is the speaker-addressee relationship there is always the time *now*, i.e. the time mutually shared by the speaker and the addressee. *Now* is a word, I think, that can only be defined in such a way, in relation to the speaker and the addressee. We call such properties of language *deixis*, and

words like *now* are called *deictic* expressions or *deictics*. Another of the deictics in English is *here*: hence *here* too is definable only in relation to the speaker and the addressee, although in the case of *here* it can either be inclusive of the addressee(s), as in 'We are all of us *here* in the auditorium,' or it can be exclusive of the addressee(s), as in 'I am *here* on the stage; you are *there* on the floor.' This does not apply to *now*: the time that is *now* to me is invariably *now* to you.

It is perhaps not too far-fetched to conclude from examples such as (6) and (7) that when we thus engage in cooperative behavior we become like one entity, not entirely, of course, but in certain relevant respects. Obviously, we are separate individuals, but when interacting cooperatively our attentions tend to work in much the same way, in terms of what to pay attention to, and what not to. Even at this moment, for example, when I am speaking to you and you are listening to me, my attention and yours have converged to such an extent that we tend to look at things more or less in the same way, if only during my talk.

Bearing these considerations in mind, let us get back to (5). Since this is a sentence from narrative discourse the writer-reader relationship is formed during the process of interpreting (5); in fact, the formation of the relationship depends critically on the reading process itself. More specifically, the writer-reader relationship is established solely through the process of interpreting a story; and this interpretive process, mind you, is essentially the process of 'past' events unfolding one after another in the story. This, among other things, is why *now* is used in (5), along with the past-tense statement *John was sad*. This does not, however, mean that the temporal adverb *now* is always used in past-tense narratives, since instead of (5) it is perfectly possible to say 'John was sad *then*', for example; what it means is simply that there is a constant possibility of the adverb *now* appearing in past-tense narratives, as in (5). This is indeed a peculiar phenomenon found largely in literary texts, though the phenomenon, as said earlier, is not restricted to novels, as attested in (8):

(8) But *now* the government saw war with the West staring it in the face.

[E. O. Reischauer, *Japan: Past and Present*]

What then about a semantic clash in (5) between the word *now* and the past tense? Do we detect any illogicality in (5)? None at all; when you are thus deeply immersed in the story, the unfolding of events tends to be in the foreground of your attention, as occurring 'here and now', while the 'pastness' of the events represented by the past tense is pushed towards the

background of your attention. This indeed is how our attentions work, as amply demonstrated by cognitive linguists.

3. Now one of the more controversial issues in linguistics in recent years has been a phenomenon called *metalinguistic negation*. Metalanguage, from which the word *metalinguistic* derives, is the language used to talk about language. Consider the following pair of sentences:

(9) a. Cheonan is a beautiful city.

b. Cheonan is a seven-letter word.

(9a) is about a city in South Korea in the real world, and it refers to the city as *beautiful*. By contrast, (9b) is strictly about the proper noun *Cheonan*, and says that the word *Cheonan* contains seven letters in it. On the basis of such a pair of sentences as (9a) and (9b), it is frequently pointed out that there are two distinct types of language use, one being *descriptive*, as in (9a), concerned with the real world; and the other being *metalinguistic*, as in (9b), concerned with language itself, and thus not having to do with the real world.

This distinction, I suppose, is pretty easy to see in the pair of sequences in (10), and also in a sentence like (11), containing negation:

(10) a. We didn't see the hippopotamuses. (But) we saw the rhinoceroses.

b. We didn't see the hippopotamuses. We saw the hippopotami.

(11) We don't eat tom[a:təuz] here, we eat tom[eiDəuz].

What (10a) states is that although we did not see the hippopotamuses we did see the rhinoceroses. It claims that the states of affairs expressed, i.e. *we didn't see the hippopotamuses* and *we saw the rhinoceroses*, are both true, i.e. exactly what actually happened in the real world. In contrast, (10b) is about the word *hippopotamus*, claiming that its correct plural form is *hippopotami*, and not *hippopotamuses*: clearly, (10b) has to do with the language itself rather than with what actually happened in the real world. Likewise, (11) is apparently about language, contending that the valid pronunciation of the word in question is not /təma:təuz/ but /təmeiDəuz/. Let us call the type of negation as in (10a) *descriptive* negation, and the type used in (10b) and (11) *metalinguistic* negation.

Things are, however, not always as straightforward as (10) or (11). Let us consider a few more examples:

(12) X: Isn't it tiring for you to drive to work?

Y: I don't DRIVE to work; I JOG.

(13) Mary's not HAPPY; she's ECSTATIC.

Take (12), for example. Is Y's utterance *I don't drive to work* metalinguistic just like (10b) and (11), or is it descriptive like (10a)? To put it another way, is Y's utterance only about language, claiming that the situation at hand should be described as 'I *jog* to work', not as 'I *drive* to work,' and hence having nothing to do with the truth/falsehood of the event? Or, alternatively, is Y's utterance about the real world, claiming that it is not true that I drive to work; what IS true is that I jog to work? The question here is this: Is the negation in Y's utterance a case of descriptive negation, or is it one of metalinguistic negation? Let us now consider (13). Probably, (13) is more likely to be taken as a metalinguistic negation than as a descriptive negation, concerned with the choice of an expression to describe the state of Mary. It says that *ecstatic* is more appropriate to describe Mary's state than *happy*. But is that all (13) is about? Is (13) only metalinguistic, and not descriptive at all?

Let us here change our examples and consider in more detail the distinction of descriptive and metalinguistic negation:

(14) A: Mary seems happy these days.

B: She isn't HAPPY; she just puts on a brave face.

In (14), B echoes part of A's utterance, i.e. *happy*, and apparently objects to A's use of that word, substituting for it what B believes is a more appropriate phrase, i.e. *(She) puts on a brave face*. Taken this way, the negation in B's utterance is metalinguistic. On the other hand, B's utterance can also be taken as a case of descriptive negation, claiming that it is not true that Mary is happy, and that what is really true is that she just puts on a brave face. The question here again is: Is B's utterance *She isn't HAPPY* metalinguistic or descriptive? What do you think? A still more fundamental question is this: Why does it become difficult in cases like (14) to see clearly the descriptive/metalinguistic distinction, as compared with such clearly metalinguistic cases as (10b) and (11) where no doubt language is the focus of negation? So what do you think is going on?

What seems to be happening in (14) is this: Here the speaker and the addressee are in disagreement about how to describe the state of Mary: there is a conflict between speaker and addressee as to the use of the language. Now when A says in (14) that *Mary seems happy*

and B says of Mary that *she just puts on a brave face*, there will be two differing statements about Mary competing with each other. So long as it is understood by the participants in the dialogue that both these statements refer to the same situation in the real world, the discrepancy between *happy* and *put on a brave face* will become easily noticeable, and it looks as if B was more interested in correcting A's use of *happy* than in giving an alternative statement about Mary. This is the reason, in my view, why B's utterance *She isn't HAPPY* sounds like a metalinguistic rather than a descriptive negation.

Metalinguistic negation becomes even more prominent in (13), *She's not HAPPY; she's ECSTATIC*, since here the two adjectives, *happy* and *ecstatic*, are very close in meaning with *ecstatic* being higher in the degree of euphoria than *happy*. This is why, I think, (13) is most likely taken as a case of metalinguistic negation rather than of descriptive negation: the speaker's concern is mostly with an appropriate choice of words, rejecting *happy* in favor of *ecstatic*. Ultimately, in (10b), which also is intended to be descriptive, the two plural forms, *hippopotamuses* and *hippopotami*, are understood to have a strictly identical meaning. To the extent that this is indeed so in (10b), the immediate interest of the speaker is no longer in describing the situation: his attention will focus almost entirely on which of the two words, *hippopotamuses* or *hippopotami*, is the correct plural form of *hippopotamus*. And I think this is why the negation in (10b) is almost invariably taken as metalinguistic rather than as descriptive.

4. Finally, among many things I haven't touched on during my talk, here is one question, a puzzle, in fact, that I would like to pose to you as a homework assignment. Now we have a set of sentences called *performative sentences*. These are sentences whose very utterance performs the acts mentioned in the sentences. Some examples are:

(15) I promise to come next week.

(16) I agree with you there.

(17) I order you to leave the room.

By uttering (15), for example, the speaker has performed the act of *promising*: his very utterance of (15) constitutes a promise. The same goes for (16) and (17): the utterance of (16) is itself an act of agreeing, and the utterance of (17) constitutes an order. By contrast, the following are not *performative*, although they, too, have first-person subjects and are in the

present tense:

(18) I fix the roof.

(19) I fry an egg.

Obviously, you cannot fix the roof by simply uttering (18), nor can you fry an egg just by saying (19). So what is the crucial difference between the two sets? This is one question that has been bothering linguists for many years, and still does. What do you think? Can you figure the puzzle out?

References

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