



From the many voices to the subject positions in anti-globalization discourse: Enunciative pragmatics and the polyphonic organization of subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

This contribution presents enunciative pragmatics as a methodological orientation to account for how written texts are contextualized in the act of reading. As an offspring of the pragmatic turn among French-speaking linguists, the enunciative approach is mobilized to analyze the cover page of a cartoon on the anti-globalization legend José Bové. Focusing on the complex interpretive problems of political discourse, the enunciative-pragmatic approach shows how readers construct subject positions following the text's complex indexicality. It reveals the polyphonic play of voices orchestrated by the enunciative markers. Therefore, enunciative pragmatics promises to bridge the gulf that separates text-based and process-oriented approaches to language in use as well as between micro- and macrosociological levels of analysis.

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1. Introduction: toward a multidisciplinary understanding of pragmatics

If pragmatics is commonly defined as the study of language in use, two conceptions of pragmatics need to be distinguished.¹ According to a narrow understanding, pragmatics designates a subfield of linguistics looking into the way in which texts reflect and orient their uses in context. In this vein, linguistic pragmatics deals with phenomena such as deixis, presupposition, implicature and performative verbs (Levinson, 1983). In a more general sense, however, pragmatics covers various approaches in the social sciences and humanities studying the social production of meaning in the interplay of language, praxis and knowledge (Verschueren et al., 1996; Cummings, 2005). Following such a broad understanding, pragmatics not only focuses on language, i.e. the formal organization of written and oral texts in view of discursive activity, but it also deals with meaning-producing practices (including symbolic acts and interactive processes) as well as with knowledge mobilized in the interpretive process (including genres, contexts and settings).

Comprising linguists, social scientists and philosophers, pragmatics broadly understood is characterized by a number of disciplinary cleavages (Angermüller, 2011b). From a linguistic point of view, pragmatics broadens the analytical purview of linguists beyond the level of words, sentences and texts so as to account for the contexts in which language is used. In the social sciences, by contrast, pragmatics has given important impulses to the question of the "actor". Inspired by pragmatist thought from North America and analytical tendencies in philosophy, process-oriented tendencies of pragmatics such as symbolic interactionism (Strauss, 1959), the ethnography of communication (Duranti, 1997), sociolinguistics

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(Gumperz, 1982; Auer et al., 1999), ethnomethodological conversation analysis (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1997) and Goffman's sociology (e.g. 1981) typically highlight the practical competence of actors engaged in negotiating identities and social order. In this view, there is no pre-given structure which determines what the actors say, do and think. In the interactive situation, the actors are confronted with problems that call for their creative practical solutions. Society, in other words, needs to be practically achieved by actors who do more than just carry out recipes or scripts.

In the light of the disciplinary (and national) cleavages between text-based approaches to written texts and process-oriented approaches to talk in interaction, the contours of pragmatics as an interdisciplinary field are difficult to delineate. While linguists often draw from pragmatics to call into question grammatical and normative approaches to language, their counterparts in the social sciences usually have a stake in the constructivist turn in social theory. As constructivists, these social scientists not only refuse to see society as a reality existing independently of the practical achievements of the actors but they also often conceive of the actors themselves as an effect of the interpretive process. Thus, pragmatic ideas have indeed crucially informed the microsociological turn to the “actor” in qualitative social research as well as the “linguistic turn” in social theory more generally (Watzlawick et al., 1967; Habermas, 1985; Luhmann, 1998; Boltanski, 1991).

Yet the constructivist implications of pragmatics in the social sciences are not always taken into account. While many linguists have mobilized pragmatic insights to account for the social and historical dimensions of language use, they generally stop short of the practical problems actors encounter in negotiating social meaning. Critical Discourse Analysts, e.g. mobilize macrosociological theory to situate linguistic activity “in society”. With his “three-dimensional model”, Fairclough, e.g. suggests relating texts to the social practices (Fairclough, 1992:86), i.e. the political forces of the broader historical context (Wodak, 2007:207ff; Jäger, 2007). Conversation analysts, however, have suggested that social order is no reality the actors just need to adopt. While they generally warn not to subsume empirical observations under prefabricated theoretical categories, they usually focus on the way in which social order between the speakers is practically achieved in interactive processes. Even though several attempts have been made at negotiating between both positions (cf. van Dijk, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2005), the question of the social context, it seems, has given rise to a conflict between, on the one hand, the macrosociological focus on large social groups, power and inequality and, on the other hand, the microsociological focus on the local dynamics of conversations in which the speakers are deployed in turn-taking sequences.

Representatives of CA usually limit their scope of analysis within the bounds of a face-to-face situation whereas CDA scholars tend to pass over the practical problems involved in contextualizing texts. To close the gap, I will discuss the contribution of French enunciative pragmatics (“*énonciation*”) to the analysis of written texts in context (cf. Lorda, 2010; Angermüller, 2011a) and delineate an enunciative-pragmatic model for the analysis of subjectivity in written texts.

While it is well known that in France the social study of meaning has been crucially influenced by the structuralist controversy during the 1960s, the enunciative-pragmatic tendencies that have succeeded structuralism since the late 1970s have gone largely unnoticed outside France (but see Williams, 1999; Fairclough, 2003). More than interactionist or conversationalist strands of pragmatics, enunciative discourse analysis insists on the opaque materiality of written texts. As a text-based, “materialist” variant of pragmatics, this variant of pragmatics focuses on how the text's formal markers (*marques, repères*) testify to the subjectivity of the discourse participants and thus instruct the readers about the contexts needed to develop an understanding of who speaks. In this sense, the special added value of enunciative pragmatics is to account for how actors are positioned and deployed in (written) discourse through the markers of enunciation. By showing how texts orchestrate a polyphonic concert of discursive speakers, I will present an enunciative analysis of the textually reflected rules according to which the readers of texts construct knowledge about the discursive contexts in which text are used—the local situative contexts of specific discursive acts up to wider sociohistorical contexts which form the background of the discursive activity of larger social groups.

Bringing text-based and process-oriented approaches into a productive exchange, this contribution attempts to present the theory and method of enunciative pragmatics in three steps. I will begin with a short overview of the major trends in enunciative pragmatics that have developed in the wake of pioneers such as Benveniste, Ducrot and Foucault. I will then give an example of an enunciative analysis by looking at a comic about the French “anti-globalization” activist José Bové. By putting emphasis on the markers of polyphony of the cover page, I will point out its complex indexical organization which allows the reader to construct the contours of a “global” scene of anti-globalization discourse with subject positions such as “capitalists” versus “anti-globalization activists”. I will then delineate a three-floor model of subjectivity according to which subject positions are considered as practical accomplishments of readers who follow the text's enunciative markers to cope with the numerous voices of political discourse. As a conclusion, I will suggest enunciative pragmatics as a methodological orientation for empirical discourse research complementing constructivist developments in social theory. With its focus on the markers of enunciation, enunciative pragmatics provides a text-based approach to the construction of subjectivity in written texts.

2. The enunciative-pragmatic turn in French linguistics

It is well-known that in France Saussure's structural linguistics reached an apogee during the 1960s. The structural model promised to explain an unlimited number of linguistic phenomena by a limited number of grammatical rules and constitutive units. As its scope of application was extended to social and cultural life more generally, a number of transdisciplinary fields of research were established such as discourse analysis and semiotics, sometimes inspired by Marxist and psychoanalytical ideas. In the course of the 1970s, the structuralist hegemony was challenged by approaches in linguistics turning around the problem of enunciation (*énonciation*). With the turn to pragmatics, the Saussurian opposition

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