



Introduction to Pragmatics

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Abstract: This paper is a review of the book introduction to pragmatics written by Betty J. Birner. The book includes a discussion of pragmatic concepts such as conversational implicatures, maxims, presuppositions, references, speech acts and given and new information in discourse. Maxims are maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation. According to Birner one can either obey these maxims or violate them. Presuppositions are examined in relation to the notion of entailment. Basically, a negative utterance tells us what one cannot presuppose. The book talks about three speech acts and their function. These acts are locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. The discussion of reference includes deixis Personal deixis and time deixis are examined. The chapter also includes an account of anaphora and cataphora. The discussion of given and new information tells us what information is new and what is old to the hearer. The author provides clear examples for each topic she discusses in the book. It is a recommendable guidebook for students of linguistics because it lays out a useful insight for learners about how pragmatics operates in conveying meaning.

Keywords: Maxims, Presuppositions, Speech Acts, Given, New, Context.

Edimbilime Giriş

Öz: Bu makale Betty J. Birner tarafından yazılan pragmatığe giriş kitabının bir incelemesidir. Kitap, konuşmayla ilgili imalar, özdeyişler, ön varsayımlar, referanslar, söz edimleri ve söylemdeki verili ve yeni bilgiler gibi pragmatik kavramların bir tartışmasını içerir. Özdeyişler kalitenin, niceliğin, tarzın ve ilişkinin maksimumudur. Birner'e göre kişi bu özdeyişlere ya uyabilir ya da onları ihlal edebilir. Ön varsayımlar, gerektirme kavramıyla bağlantılı olarak incelenmektedir. Temel olarak, olumsuz bir ifade bize kimsenin önceden varsayamayacağı şeyi söyler. Kitapta üç söz ediminden ve bunların işlevlerinden bahsediliyor. Bu edimler; hitabet, edimsöz ve vurmalı söz edimleridir. Referans tartışması kişisel gösterimleri ve zaman gösterimlerini inceliyor. Bu bölümde ayrıca anafora ve kataforanın bir açıklaması da yer alıyor. Verilen ve yeni bilgilerin tartışılması bize, dinleyen için hangi bilginin yeni, neyin eski olduğunu anlatır. Yazar kitapta ele aldığı her konu için net örnekler veriyor. Dilbilim öğrencileri için tavsiye edilebilir bir rehber kitaptır çünkü dil bilimi öğrencileri için pragmatığın anlamı aktarmada nasıl işlediğine dair yararlı bir anlayış ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Özdeyişler, Ön Varsayımlar, Söz Eylemleri, Verili, Yeni, Bağlam.

Review

The aim of this paper is to provide a review of the book “introduction to pragmatics” written by Betty J Birner, and published by Wiley-Blackwell in 2013 (ISBN 978-1-4051-7583-8). The book consists of ten chapters, each one dealing with topics that are of great interest to the area of pragmatics. In chapter 1, the author begins with the definition of pragmatics and also

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mentions the importance of context in pragmatics since context dependency plays an important role in understanding the meanings of utterances beyond sentence level such as what is being implied by the speaker and what is being inferred by the hearer. In this chapter, the author also includes a discussion of other areas of linguistics and their relationship to pragmatics. Such areas are phonology, syntax, semantics and discourse analysis. Each relationship is supported with sample utterances for pragmatic analysis.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the discussion of Gricean implicatures. Implicatures and maxims are quite essential to pragmatic analysis. Grice (1975) proposes that there are four maxims which people use as norms to achieve interaction. These are maxim of quality, quantity, manner and relation. Birner states that there are situations in which one can either obey these maxims or violate them. The author supports these claims by providing several examples and explaining how speakers or hearers obey or violate those maxims.

Chapter 3 discusses Neo Gricean theories such as Q and R implicature and I, and M implicature theories. In the same chapter, lexical pragmatics is also described as the relationship between pragmatics and lexicon. Finally, the author includes a discussion of relevance theory in which it is suggested that every apparent stimulus conveys a meaning.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the discussion of reference. Terms such as anaphoric pronouns, cataphora and deixis are defined. The author describes types of deixis in detail with examples. For instance, *that person* is a personal deixis whereas *then* is a time deixis in an utterance such as “We did not know that person at all back then”. In addition, this chapter includes a depiction of articles the, a, an in order to demonstrate how they achieve definiteness and indefiniteness.

Chapter 5 examines another essential concept of pragmatics that is presupposition. The author discusses how presupposition operates under the notions of negation and entailment. Basically, negativity enables one to comprehend what cannot be presupposed by an utterance. For instance, the author uses the example “my wife has not been kidnapped” and this shows us that another utterance such as “someone kidnapped my wife” cannot be presupposed since the first utterance clearly indicates that there has been no kidnapping. The author continues her discussion by going over the factors that trigger presupposition. Among these factors are factive verbs (the verbs that take a sentence as their complement), and iteratives which are basically the repetitions of some past action.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the discussion of speech acts. The author provides examples to illustrate how locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts operate. One example could be the utterance “it is going to rain”. In this utterance locutionary act is the statement it is going to rain. Illocutionary act is the speaker’s intention to take an umbrella. Finally, perlocution would take place when the listener complies with the illocution and takes the umbrella before they go out. This chapter also includes a discussion of performative acts which are both statements and they also perform an act at the time they are being uttered as in I name this ship San Sebastian, where the speaker performs the act of naming a ship. Another topic being discussed in chapter 6 is politeness and face. The author gives examples of how people act in order to avoid face threatening interactions and choose politeness strategies instead.

Chapter 7 is called information structure. Information structure involves how information is presented in speech, specifically how more or less familiar information is organized to aid the listener in processing the conversation. The author introduces various theories regarding the concepts of "given" and "new" in discourse. The interest in open propositions, discourse-status, and hearer-status are brought into attention. An open proposition is a statement with one or more unspecified elements. A focused element specifies the previously unspecified part in a conversation. One can categorize each element as discourse-old or discourse-new, Furthermore, an element can be classified as hearer-old or hearer-new. This depends on if the listeners might already carry the information in their knowledge base.

Chapter 8 discusses inferential relations. The author aims to establish a cohesive method for defining inferential relations. She concludes that there is still a considerable amount of work to be undertaken in this field. Lastly, she examines inferential relations at the propositional level, analyzing several suggested collections of coherence relations and questions how these relations could explain specific syntactic structures.

Chapter 9 is called dynamic semantics and the representation of discourse. This chapter deals with how predicate logic as a semantic notation system. The author suggests that this can be challenging because there may be difficulties in maintaining pronominal reference across sentences. Thus, some arbitrary representations may emerge, such as employing existential quantifiers for certain indefinite noun phrases and universal quantifiers for others. The author proposes a discourse representation theory (DRT) to deal with the problematic case of pronouns. DRT tracks pronouns throughout discourse and provides a comprehensive semantic representation of an extended conversation.

Chapter 10 is the conclusion part where the author revisits the border between semantic and pragmatics. She also mentions certain applications of pragmatics such as language and law relationship and how pragmatics works in the field of law. As an overall evaluation, we find this book quite useful with its detailed scope into the field of pragmatics. The author does quite an excellent job in providing examples and elaborating on them for each concept she introduces in this book. We find it recommendable to be used in pragmatics courses taught at university level.

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