

13 Morphology and Pragmatics

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1 The notion of morphopragmatics

Pragmatics relates linguistic structure to contextual phenomena. In other words, pragmatics can be defined as the functional perspective on language. '[P]ragmatics . . . [can] be conceived as the study of the mechanisms and motivations behind any of the choices made when using language (at the level of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, whether they are variety-internal options or whether they involve regionally, socially, or functionally distributed types of variation)' (Verschuere 1987: 36). The relevant contextual phenomena include (i) time, location, social setting and participants' roles, on the one hand, and (ii) the interlocutors' strategies, plans, goals and intentions, on the other. (i) may be referred to as aspects of the 'speech situation' and (ii) as elements of the 'speech event' (Dressler and Merlini-Barbatesi 1993: 3–4).

Morphopragmatics is the study of the interrelationship between morphology and pragmatics. Morphology is relevant pragmatically in so far as word structure (affixes, clitics) can be taken as an indication of the speech situation and/or of the speech event. Morphopragmatics has to be distinguished from lexical pragmatics, on the one hand, and syntactic pragmatics, on the other. Morphologically complex forms which are lexicalized (e.g. German *hierher* 'over here', *dorthinein* 'in there', also a large number of compounds) and which carry pragmatic information come under the heading of lexical pragmatics. Syntactically relevant morphological categories contribute to pragmatics via the syntactic structure in which they appear (e.g. case and plural marking), and belong thus to syntactic pragmatics.

Morphology falls into two parts. 'Grammatical morphology' is rule-governed, and is thus part of grammar. 'Extragrammatical morphology', on the other hand, does not conform to the rules of grammar. The latter is related to 'expressive morphology' (Zwicky and Pullum 1987; Dressler and Merlini-Barbatesi 1993: 23–6). Both types of morphology may be pragmatically relevant, but in the

case of extragrammatical morphology it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide general pragmatic accounts of the phenomena involved.

The situation is different with grammatical morphology, where the essential question to be asked is whether a morphological rule has pragmatic effects, and if so, which ones. In general, pragmatic aspects come into play whenever we have to do with competing realizations of morphological rules, or with morphological rules which do not affect denotative meaning or whose semantic contribution is minimal, or which are not prototypical of the respective domain (e.g. diminutives, augmentatives, comparatives in the case of derivational morphology, suffix-like clitics in the case of inflectional morphology).

Most work on morphopragmatics was carried out in the framework of natural morphology (Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi 1993 and the references quote therein). A number of works treat morphopragmatics under the heading of semantics (e.g. Wierzbicka 1983, 1984). Mey (1989) pleads for the study of the relationship between morphology and pragmatics, and by way of illustration provides a brief survey of some morphological means for expressing power and solidarity. A description of emotive attitudes expressed by diminutives can be found in Volek (1987). However, Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi 1993 is the only systematic work on morphopragmatics to date.

2 Pragmatics and inflection

Inflection has primarily a syntactic function: it makes the word conform to whatever is required by syntax. In a number of cases, however, there is a choice available between inflectional categories or between affixes expressing the same inflectional category or categories, which may be determined by pragmatic factors.

2.1 Case marking in Polish

A case in point is case marking in Polish (Wierzbicka 1983). In Polish the nominative plural has several allomorphs conditioned by a number of different factors. For example, human masculine nouns with a hard stem can take one of the following endings: *-i*, *-y* and *-owie*. The first ending is neutral; it has no pragmatic implications. The ending *-y*, however, implies contempt, and the ending *-owie* importance or dignity. Some masculine nouns have a choice between two or sometimes even three of these endings. Thus, for example, an inherently respectful word such as *profesor* or *astronom*, which normally takes the *-y* suffix, can be lowered to a neutral form such as *profesorzy* or *astronomy* (with an underlying *-i* suffix which surfaces as *-y* in certain well-defined phonological contexts), and jokingly even a contemptuous word such as *lobuz* 'rascal' can be raised to a marked neutral form such as *lobuzi*, but not to a respectful

form such as **lobuzowie*. Consequently, in addition to phonological and semantic factors, the choice of the nominative plural depends on pragmatic factors, on the intentions and goals of the speaker.

2.2 *Inflectional suffixes in Hungarian and stylistic layer*

The choice of inflectional suffixes may have stylistic consequences. The stylistic meaning of suffixes may range from 'substandard' to 'formal'. For example, the first-person plural conditional has two variants for the definite conjugation: *-nánk/-nénk* and *-nök/-nök*. The first variant is neutral; the second one belongs to the 'elevated style', and can be used in an appropriate speech situation only. The same holds true for the two variants of the first- and third-person singular present tense conditional suffixes for the indefinite conjugation (*-nék* and *-nám/-ném, -na/-ne* and *-nék*, respectively). In both cases, the older forms belong to the elevated style, whereas the more recent forms are stylistically neutral. Upcoming forms, on the other hand, are often 'substandard'. For example, in careless colloquial speech the present tense indicative endings are sometimes replaced by the corresponding suffixes of the imperative: thus forms such as *takarít-suk* 'we are tidying up' and *vált-sa* 'he is changing' are used instead of *takarít-juk* and *vált-ja*. This variation is partly conditioned phonologically: it is possible only after stem-final or suffix-final *-t*. The use of the imperative instead of the indicative is typical of certain social settings and age-groups.

2.3 *Inflectional suffixes as indicators of the speech event*

It also happens that the choice of one inflectional variant rather than the other indicates the strength of illocutionary force. For example, in Hungarian some imperatives appear in two forms: for example, *ad-d* 'give' and *ad-jad, mond-d* 'say' and *mond-jad*, both second-person singular imperative. Typically, the shorter forms are used to issue a stronger order, and the longer forms are preferred when the speaker wants to issue an attenuated order.

2.4 *Inflectional suffixes and honorifics*

In Japanese, which seems to have one of the most complex systems of honorifics, some variants are due to morphology rather than to syntax. For example, from among the three ways of expressing the sentence 'Here is a book': (i) *Koko ni hon ga aru*, (ii) *Koko ni hon ga ari-masu* and (iii) *Koko ni hon ga gozai-masu*, (i) is the most neutral, (ii) the polite and (iii) the super-polite variant (Harada 1976:

553–4). *-masu* is an inflectional suffix, and *gozai* is a suppletive form of the existential verb *aru*. The relevant speech situation may be analysed in terms of the speaker, the hearer, other participants, place, time and topic (Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi 1993: 48–51). It has been observed, for example, that female speakers use polite *-masu* forms more often than male speakers. As far as the hearer is concerned, the polite *-masu* forms are always used with members of an out-group. Also television and radio speakers and oral announcements in train and subway stations use these forms, because the addressees are considered to be members of an out-group. Furthermore, if the hearer has authority over the speaker (in terms of relative social status, power, age), the *-masu* form must be used. If a bystander is present who is a member of an out-group or whose rank is higher than that of the speaker, again the polite form must be used. The place and the time of the interaction influence the formality of the speech situation, and constitute an overriding factor. For example, funerals, weddings and opening ceremonies demand the use of *-masu*. Also a change of topic may prompt the use of *-masu*: for example, businessmen use *-masu* when their topic switches from personal items to business. Additional factors come into play when the super-polite form is used.

3 Derivational morphology and pragmatics

Derivational processes which affect syntactic structure do not seem to have any direct relevance to pragmatics. Thus, causatives and passives derived from a base verb or deverbal nouns can attain pragmatic relevance only via the syntactic structure into which they enter. Typically, morphopragmatics becomes pertinent with derivational affixes which do not affect syntax. Another area where pragmatic effects may be expected are instances of non-prototypical derivation.

3.1 *The Japanese beautificational prefix*

Japanese has a derivational beautificational prefix *o-*, which is used to make speech softer and more polite (Harada 1976: 504). For example, by using this prefix, an offer becomes more polite. Compare *Biiru ikaga?* 'How about a beer?' with *O-biiru ikaga?* 'Would you like some beer?'

3.2 *Australian depreciatives*

A 'depreciative' form constitutes an abbreviation of the standard form combined with a pseudo-diminutive suffix (Wierzbicka 1984: 128–9). Thus, the 'depreciative' form of *present* is *prezzie*, of *mushrooms* is *mushies*, of *barbecue* is *barbie*. Though the pseudo-diminutive suffix *-ie* does not mean smallness, it is

not void of semantic meaning. It carries the connotation that the thing denoted by the noun should not be considered a big thing. Pragmatically, depreciatives express informality (hence they cannot be used in formal settings) and solidarity (hence they are inappropriate in speech situations in which solidarity is excluded).

3.3 *Italian diminutives*

Italian has a considerable number of diminutive suffixes. The productive suffixes are *-ino*, *-etto*, *-ello*, *-(u)olo*, *-uccio/-uzzo*, *-otto* and *-onzolo*. For example, *film* – *film-ino*, *verme* ‘worm’ – *verm-etto*, *mano* ‘hand’ – *man-uccia*. Pragmatically, diminutives express an evaluation or judgement which depends on the speaker’s intentions, perspective and standards of evaluation. The most general pragmatic meaning of diminutives seems to be non-seriousness. That is, by using the diminutive suffix, the speaker evaluates his speech act as being non-serious. Furthermore, in order to minimize the risk of disapproval on the part of the hearer, the propositional content of the speech act is shifted into an imaginary world. For example, *Eh, sono dei bei sold-ini/dollar-ini!* ‘Well, they are of the nice moneys-/dollars’ – diminutive: ‘Well, that’s a pretty penny’, where the diminutive is used to downgrade the precision of the statement concerning the bigness of the amount. The use of the diminutive can be analysed adequately in terms of (i) speech situations, (ii) speech acts and (iii) regulative factors such as playfulness, emotion, intimacy, understatement, modesty, euphemism, etc. Typical speech situations in which diminutives are used are child-centered, pet-centered and lover-centered speech situations. As to speech acts, the main contribution of diminutives is the modification of the relative strength of a speech act (Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi 1993: 54–275).

3.4 *Italian intensification (augmentatives)*

Intensification in Italian can be expressed by means of the suffix *-one* as in *porta* ‘door’ – *port-one*, *mano* ‘hand’ – *man-one*, *tazza* ‘cup’ – *tazz-ona*. Like diminutives, augmentatives indicate the fictiveness of the situation at hand. ‘The speaker suspends the norms of the real world and makes the norms of his evaluation glide upwards’ (ibid.: 291). But, in contrast to the diminutive, where in most cases the semantic meaning of smallness is lost, the augmentative preserves the semantic feature of bigness. Compare the augmentative in (i) with the diminutive in (ii): (i) *Come vorrei essere nel mio lett-one!* ‘How I’d like to be in my bed’ – augmentative: ‘How I’d love to be in my big bed!’; (ii) *Come vorrei essere nel mio lett-ino!* ‘How I’d love to be in my snug little bed!’ In (ii) the bed is not taken to be small, while in (i) the bed is certainly big in the speaker’s imaginary world. The importance of the feature of bigness is responsible, among other things, for the frequent use of augmentatives in overstatements and in exaggerations (ibid.: 275–326).

3.5 The excessive in Hungarian and Viennese German

In Hungarian, the excessive is formed by repeating the superlative prefix *leg-*: *leg-es-leg-*, where *es* stands for the conjunction *és* 'and'; or even *leg-es-leg-es-leg-*, which is added to the comparative form: *nagy* 'big' – *nagy-obb* 'bigger' – *leg-nagy-obb* 'biggest' – *legesleg-nagy-obb* 'the very biggest'. The corresponding German prefix is *aller-*, preposed to a superlative: *aller-neu-est* 'the most recent of all'. The excessive expresses the absolutely highest possible degree of a property, and it is compared only with items which have this property to a high degree; it is used for emphasis and for impressing the hearer (Dressler and Kiefer 1990: 69–72). The excessive can also be used as a corrective device in discourse: *Das ist sehr schlimm* 'That is very bad' – *Aber das allerschlimmste ist, dass . . .* 'But the very worst of all is that . . .'. Furthermore, it may express the last word on the matter in question. At the end of a TV discussion, the moderator may ask the question *Gibt's noch eine allerletzte Frage?* 'Is there a truly last question?', with the excessive *allerletzte* 'very last' signalling that an extra question is still possible, but that this opportunity must be taken immediately, and that any other question will be totally excluded (Dressler and Merlini-Barbaresi 1993: 373).

4 Compounds

Much less is known about the pragmatics of compounds. Morphopragmatics is concerned with the pragmatic effects of *ad hoc* compounds; lexical compounds with lexicalized meaning fall outside its scope. Compounds have been investigated mainly with respect to their discourse function (Dressler 1982, Brekle 1986). For example, compounds have a special discourse referential function; they are used when a pronoun would not suffice to establish referential identity between two expressions: for example, *die Wahlkampfmannschaft von Strauss* – *die Strauss-Mannschaft* 'Strauss' election-campaign team' (Brekle 1986: 46). *Apple-juice seat* is an English example for a compound used as a deictic device (Downing 1977: 823). Also, newly coined compounds, in virtue of their innovative nature, have a foregrounding function. This function can be observed particularly well in poetic language, in advertising and in journalism (in headlines). Furthermore, most *ad hoc* compounds are many-ways ambiguous. The inherent ambiguity of compounds is often exploited in poetry, in political discourse and in jokes.

5 Clitic particles

The study of the pragmatic effects of clitic particles may be subsumed under the heading of morphopragmatics, since they behave in many respects exactly

like affixes: they are unable to bear stress; they have a fixed position in word structure; and quite often they cannot be attached to just any type of word.

5.1 *Evidential clitics*

Evidential particles are often expressed by suffixes, and are thus part of word structure. In Wintu, an American Indian language spoken in Northern California, direct evidence is unmarked and assumed to be visual, whereas non-visual sensory evidence and inference from intuition are marked by the suffix *-nthEr*. Both second- and third-hand hearsay evidence is marked by *-kee*, inference from observed results by *-ree*, and inference from previous experience by *-?el* (Willett 1988: 64–5). Evidential markers are pragmatically relevant in so far as they modify or determine the speech act performed. The speaker may assert a statement or a supposition, but he or she may also express emphasis and surprise. The latter seem to arise when the claimed fact is directly observable by both the speaker and the hearer. In Turkish, for example, the evidential suffix *-miş* is used to convey inference and hearsay. But an utterance such as *Ahmet gel-miş* ‘Ahmet came’ could also be an expression of surprise, even if the speaker has had full, sensory information of Ahmet’s arrival. For example, this utterance could be used in a situation in which the speaker hears someone approach from outside and open the door, and sees Ahmet, provided that Ahmet is a totally unexpected visitor. The same particle can also be used to express scorn, irony and compliments (Aksu-Koç and Slobin 1986: 162–3). Moreover, evidentials may influence the strength of assertion. Between the source of information and the strength of assertion the following correlation seems to hold: ‘The source of a speaker’s information can skew the relation between his/her conception of the truth and the strength of his/her assertion about that situation’ (Willett 1988: 86). Thus, emphatic assertion can be based only on attested evidence, doubtful truth only on inference.

Evidential suffixes may even determine the illocutionary force of the utterance. Kashaya, for example, has a pair of performative suffixes, *-wela* and *-mela*, which signify that the speaker knows of what he speaks because he is performing the act himself or has just performed it. These suffixes are often used to introduce a conversation. As a conversational interchange develops from the opening remarks, the performative suffixes are replaced by the factual-visual suffixes *-wa* and *-ya* (Oswalt 1986: 34–6).

5.2 *Other clitics*

Clitics may also function as illocutionary act indicators. Some clitics in Ngiyambaa (South Australian), for example, are used to express the speaker’s beliefs about what he or she is saying, giving performative equivalents like ‘I assert that . . .’, ‘I counter-assert that . . .’, ‘I guess that . . .’ (Donaldson 1980:

253–8). The speaker may also make explicit the source of his or her evidence by means of an evidential suffix. In that case evidential suffixes always follow ‘belief’ clitics. In Ngiyambaa the suffixes *-ba:*, *-bara* and *-baga:* mark assertions, and *-gila* marks a hypothesis. Plain assertion is expressed by *-ba:*, categorical assertion by *-bara*, counter-assertion by *-baga:*, hypothetical assertion by *-gila*. For example, *guyan-baga:-dhu gara*, shy counter-assert I am, ‘But I am shy’ used to invalidate a previous pragmatic presupposition (‘People are not reticent’). The suffix *-gila* also occurs in boasts, ‘whose essence is that they assert the subjective, and not necessarily confirmed, value of what is being boasted about’.

In a Central Australian language, Mparntwe Arrernte (Aranda), clitics are used to indicate the illocutionary force of criticism and/or complaint. These pragmatic effects are functions of the meaning of these clitics, of culture-specific pragmatic factors and speech situation. The relevant particle clitics are *-itanye*, *-iknge*, *-me*, *-kathene* and *kwele* (Wilkins 1986: 577). Of these, only the last one does not exhibit suffix-like behaviour. Criticism or complaint is expressed by *-iknge*: for example, *R-iknge angke-me*, which, depending on the speech situation, may mean either ‘He’s always speaking?’ (When do I get my chance?), ‘(Poor thing.) He’s always having to speak’, or ‘He never stops speaking’ (The big-mouth). The clitic *-kathene* invokes special socio-cultural norms determined by the relationship between the participants in the speech situation. The use of this suffix presupposes the ‘full command of the sociocultural knowledge of what obligations various relations entail and what constitutes a breach of those obligations’. The clitic *-me* alludes to unfair expectations of what the speaker should do, and forces the addressee to realize what he or she should normally expect of the speaker, and so how he or she should behave. Finally, *-itanye* is the contrary of the expectation clitic, and expresses surprise (Wilkins 1986: 575–96).

