Review of
Language and Digital Media: Pragmatics Online

SAIMA NOMAAN

University of Exeter, UK
snomaanali@gmail.com

The seminal and pioneering work of Austin (1975) and Grice (1989), which laid the foundations for Pragmatics as a subfield of linguistics, determine *context* as an unequivocal component for making meaning in human communication. With the rapidly changing times where new technologies are constantly evolving and unique, innovative digital mediums of communication using the Internet are fast emerging, the interest in online or Internet Pragmatics as a novel linguistic phenomenon is also gaining momentum. The overview of the journal of Internet Pragmatics refers to this as a "response to the emerging challenges of applying pragmatic perspectives to the internet or technologically mediated interaction" (John Benjamins e-Platform, n.d.), and it studies language use, its communicative functions, and the interpretation of social interactions and discourse in digitally mediated contexts; it involves the expression of attitudes, construction of online identity, and communication of language ideology in online digital contexts. Albeit having their constraints and resources, the Internet and social media acquire immense significance within the constantly evolving modalities of human communication and necessitate an understanding of how meaning is communicated, negotiated and navigated in online contexts.

As a result, this new publication *Pragmatics Online,* as part of a series of edited books titled *Language and Digital Media*, illuminates the main concepts in studying online communication in digital contexts from the pragmatics perspective and is a timely and valuable addition to rather pauce literature on the topic. Written in a pellucid, appealing and accessible manner, the volume is about communication in technology-mediated contexts and how users adapt themselves to navigate and exploit meaning. It provides a profound understanding of applying and evaluating conventional pragmatic ideas to digitally mediated contexts within this globally hyper-connected world. Scott asserts that as "an essential guide to the pragmatics of online discourse and behaviour for students and researchers working in the areas of digital pragmatics" (p. i), the book serves as a guide for researchers in the fields of English language and linguistics, media, and communication studies and includes analysis of data based on current rigorous research along with the discussion of the topics within the overarching theoretical framework of the book (i.e., the Speech Act Theory and the Relevance Theory).

Notably, with its compelling and straightforward writing style and real-life examples, the book captivates the reader while focusing on understanding pragmatics at work in mediated communication and proves that the same rules of relevance theory and speech act theory can be applied to mediated communication as in face-to-face communication. Grounded in research on intercultural and interpersonal pragmatics and based on the Speech Act and Relevance theories, this cutting-edge original work encompasses comprehensive research and literature from English language and non-English contexts and critically evaluates and critiques several research studies in the field. Through examples, the author effectively establishes a connection between the pragmatic theory and digitally mediated communication involving billions of intelligent communicating "things" (i.e., Internet-of-things-related content) (Li *et al.*, 2018), and identifies new areas for future research, for example, "Twitter ratio" (p. 56).

Complementing Herring *et al.*'s (2013) pioneering work *Pragmatics of Computer-Mediated Communication* on the pragmatics of email, blogging, real-time chats and instant text/voice messaging on mobile phones and computers, Scott extends the scope of traditional pragmatics to digital technologies and social media. Similar to *Pragmatics of Social Media* by Hoffmann and Bublitz (2017) and Xie, Yus, and Haberland's (2021) *Approaches to Internet Pragmatics: Theory and Practice*, this volume also focuses on socio-cultural elements and participatory practices online and provides an authoritative state-of-the-art and comprehensive overview of the pragmatics of Internet and social media. Scott covers the Internet interactions from the pragmatics perspective concerning contextualised speech acts and Internet-specific communications on social media and provides a critical evaluation of the pragmatics of textual and audio-visual discourse and construction of identities on social media and digitally mediated/Internet-based platforms (e.g., Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and WhatsApp), as well as explores the concept of participation, privacy or publicness on social media. She reviews and critically evaluates several studies that research disagreeing, complimenting, and requesting as speech acts. She also explores the role and importance of emoticons and emojis in written/typed text conversations and physical environments in online or offline interactions, locative media and place-related communiqué. Rivalled to other publications on the topic, this book presents research on how interactions, relationships, and audiences are managed online by users, how the online identities are constructed and performed in mediated contexts, and how multi-lingual and multi-cultural discourse contexts are navigated while using the tagging, sharing, liking and memes functions in Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp digital applications.

Focusing specifically on digital online technologies, the book is structurally divided into eight chapters, each systematically dealing with the theory and research on online pragmatics and dedicated to the topics related to unique digital communication mediums used in non-face-to-face contexts. After a short and precise introduction to the volume, which delineates the overview, scope and topics within the chapters, the preface describes the author's universally relatable personal experiences of digitally communicative practices during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies users adopt to cope with the shifting contexts. Based on the assumptions that "online communication is as real as offline interaction," Locher (2010) and that the fundamental human behaviour and abilities remain unchanged albeit the varied technology-related opportunities and resources, the arguments in the book are founded on the premise that similar general pragmatic and cognitive processes are at work in both online and offline communication. The first chapter is well worth reading and subsumes importance as a prelude to the rest of the book as it introduces the pragmatics online in an accessible manner and presents a comprehensive explanation of the basic yet complex pragmatic theories, concepts and terminology to facilitate understanding and knowledge of the readers with no formal linguistics background. While presenting an overview of the book, another distinctive feature of this chapter is that it situates the research and arguments in the book within its theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 explores the communications and language use with the imagined audience in online *collapsed contexts* and how users manage their privacy from "anybody, everybody, and maybe even nobody all at once" (Wesch 2009, p. 23; Marwick and boyd, 2014). Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the pragmatics of *sharing, liking,* and *tagging* (especially the @mentions function) online using Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp applications, what communicative functions they serve, and how these acts relate to the Speech Act and Relevance Theories. Scott also aligns modern linguistic notions of the

experiential and interpersonal metafunctions recognised by Halliday's (1978) Systematic Functional Linguistics and exemplifies how liking, sharing, and hash-tagging are pragmatically functioning communicative acts in online contexts, for instance, on Twitter. Chapter 5 explores how non-verbal communication is conducted in digital contexts and how varied texts using non-standard spelling and punctuation, emoticons and emojis, and reaction GIFs are used as non-verbal cues and communicative strategies users employ in online contexts to make and negotiate meaning. Chapter 6 focuses on memes and their types (e.g., object labelling image memes) and details the similarity between their multimodal function as metaphors and their interpretation similar to the verbal metaphors in both online and offline contexts. The chapter provides two photo figures of memes, 6.1 (p. 109) and 6.2 (p. 117). While the use of exciting anecdotes and real-life exemplars from online discourses, as well as the references to rigorous research, effectively retain the reader's attention and interest throughout the book, from McGrath's (2016) *first-glance* or *Impressionistic* perspective, more illustrations, images or screenshots of online communication and memes would have provided a quick and better understanding of the social cues negotiated in such non-verbal communicative mediums along with the written descriptions.

Chapter 7 explains the pragmatic approach to the phenomenon of *Clickbait* (i.e., news headlines) engagingly and describes how they are used and produced by employing sophisticated linguistic techniques to monetise the produced and consumed content on the Internet. Finally, Chapter 8 offers an overview of the research that informed the discussions in the book and serves as a guide for future researchers as it emphasises the role and importance of theoretical frameworks in research, suggests and exemplifies various data collection and research methods along with their benefits and drawbacks, underlines the ethical considerations of anonymity diversity and personal bias, and importance of diversity for online pragmatic research. The chapter effectively delineates digital ethics in research in mediated communication in online contexts, and digital environments are splendidly exemplified.

The book emphasises that although no specific solutions to ethical dilemmas are available except the advice that discretion be exercised while reproducing and sharing pre-created content and the nature of the discourse context and privacy should be considered while making research decisions. The reader is also made aware that research on digitally mediated communication is not representative of all voices and diverse audiences but is dominated by high-profile entertainers, politicians or corporations on social media, which affects research diversity.

In sum, the book is commendable as a solid reference book for research on online pragmatics, which provides complete guidance and advice for future researchers and is a welcome addition to the resources on applied linguistics.

References

Herring, S., Stein, D. & Virtanen, T. (2013). *Pragmatics of computer-mediated communication*. De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110214468

Hoffmann, C. R., & Bu blitz, W. (Eds.). (2017). *Pragmatics of social media*. De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110431070

John Benjamins e-Platform. (n.d.). *Internet pragmatics.* https://www.jbe-platform.com/content/journals/2542386x

Li, S., Da Xu, L., & Zhao, S. (2018). 5G Internet of Things: A survey. *Journal of Industrial Information Integration*, *10*, 1-9. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jii.2018.01.005

Lecher, M. (2010). Politeness and impoliteness in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Politeness Research*, *6*, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2010.001

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2014). Networked privacy: How teenagers negotiate context in social media. *New Media and Society*, *16*(7), 1051–1067. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814543995

McGrath, I. (2016). *Materials evaluation and design for language teaching* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh University Press.

Wesch, M. (2009). YouTube and you: Experiences of self-awareness in the context collapse of the recording webcam. *Explorations in Media Ecology*, *8*(2), 19–34.

Xin, C., Yas, F., & Haberland, H. (Eds.). (2021). *Approaches to internet pragmatics: Theory and practice*. John Benjamins. https://doi.org/10.1075/pbns.318