Understanding Pragmatics

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• What is Pragmatics?

Let me start with an anecdote from my field site, the Trobriand Islands, Milne Bay Province, Papua New Guinea.
A basic misunderstanding of Trobriand ways of interacting:

Morning routine: walking to the fresh water grotto:

Question: *Ambe(ya)*?

1st Answer: *Bugei*

2nd Answer: *O kunukwali bala Bugei makala yumyam*  
Oh you know I’ll go to (the) B like every day  
(for me more and more an answer to a silly question ...)

Weyei told me the correct answer to this question would be:  
*bala bakakaya baka’ita basisu bapaisewa*  
I’ll go I’ll bath I’ll return I’ll stay I’ll work

the question *ambeya* functions as a kind of greeting!
This form of greeting is a daily routine that serves the function of **social bonding**, indicating that people care for the person greeted in this way.

Walking through the bush on small paths with sharp coral rocks can be dangerous. If people do not show up at the places they mentioned in their answer to this greeting the community will search for them. Thus, my interpretation of this little ritual as “a silly question“ was completely wrong, inadequate and somewhat conceited.

Being greeted like this by the Trobrianders was a first sign of their intention to integrate me into their village community.
This misunderstanding illustrates in a nutshell what **pragmatics** is about:

As a newcomer in the Trobriand speech community I hardly knew anything about the **conventions, rules** and **regulations** with respect to how the Trobriand Islanders **use** their **language** Kilivila **in social interactions**, what kind of **meanings** their words, phrases and sentences convey in what kind of **contexts** and what kind of **functions** their use of language fulfils in and for its speakers’ **communicative behaviour**.

To gain this kind of knowledge requires the study of the **culture-specific forms of** the Trobriand Islanders’ **language use**.

In linguistics, the **study of language use** is called ‘**pragmatics**’.
Language use is not only dependent on linguistic, that is grammatical and lexical knowledge, but also on cultural, situative and interpersonal contexts and conventions.

One of the central aims of **pragmatics** is to research **how context and convention** – in their broadest sense – **contribute to meaning and understanding** (as the anecdote I just presented illustrates).

Thus, the **social and cultural embedding of meaning** will be in the focus of this talk about **understanding pragmatics**.
Jacob Mey, one of the pioneers and leading figures in modern linguistic pragmatics, refers to this field as ‘the youngest subdiscipline of the venerable science called linguistics’ (Mey 1994: 3261; 1993: 3, 18).

Mey and many others see the rise of pragmatics and its growing popularity and influence ever since the 1970s at least in part as a reaction to the development of American structural linguistics that culminated in Noam Chomsky’s (1965: 3) proclamation of the ‘ideal speaker/listener in a completely homogeneous speech community’ whose language competence linguists describe and analyse on the basis of introspection data.
The more the Chomskyan paradigm gained influence in linguistics, the more linguists gradually realized that the general abstractions of this paradigm neglected the reality of language!

Language is
• realized in speech
• produced by speakers
• in various social, cultural and political contexts
• with various goals and intentions.
Language is much more than a grammatical algorithm with a lexicon; it is a tool speakers use to interact socially and to communicate with each other!
Research in linguistic pragmatics deals with **how speakers use their language(s) in various situations and contexts: what speakers do when they speak and why they do it.**

Pragmatics focuses on the actual language users, their – multimodal – communicative behaviour, their world and their point of view, in short, ‘the total human context of [language] use’ (Mey 1994: 3265).
Thus, pragmatics serves a kind of ‘umbrella’ function – not only for ‘sociolinguistics ... and other (semi-) hyphenated areas of linguistics’ but also for the other traditional subdisciplines of linguistics (Östman: 1988: 28).

As Mey pointed out, ‘the problems of pragmatics are not confined to the semantic, the syntactic or the phonological fields, exclusively. Pragmatics ... defines a cluster of related problems, rather than a strictly delimited area of research’ (Mey 1994: 3268).
Pragmatics studies language and its meaningful use from the perspective of language users embedded in their

- situational,
- behavioural,
- cultural,
- societal and
- political contexts,

using a broad variety of methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches depending on specific research questions and interests.
The issue of interdisciplinarity brings us back to the claim that the 1970s was the decade in which the ‘pragmatic turn’ in linguistics had its origin.

The first volume of the *Journal of Pragmatics* was published in 1977;

John Benjamins started a book series with the title *Pragmatics and Beyond* in 1979;
the International Pragmatics Association (IPrA) was founded in 1986;

and its journal *Pragmatics* started under the name *IPrA Papers in Pragmatics* a year later (1987-1990).
Indeed, if we look at core domains of the discipline, we realize that linguistic pragmatics is relevant for, and has its predecessors in, many other disciplines such as

- Philosophy,
- Psychology,
- Ethology,
- Ethnology,
- Sociology and
- the Political Sciences.
Pragmatics is not only an inherently interdisciplinary field within linguistics, but it is indeed a ‘transdiscipline’ that brings together and interacts with a rather broad variety of disciplines within the humanities which share the fundamental interest in social action:

‘The heart of the pragmatic enterprise is the description of language as social action’

(Clift et al. 2009: 50).
Pragmatics – at least in my understanding – is characterized by the following three central threads of thought:

1.) Languages are used by their speakers in social interactions; they are first and foremost **instruments for creating social bonds and accountability relations.** The **means** with which languages create these bonds and relations **vary across languages and cultures.**
2.)

Speech is part of the context of the situation in which it is produced, language has an essentially pragmatic character and ‘meaning resides in the pragmatic function of an utterance’ (Bauman 1992: 147).

- Speakers of a language follow conventions, rules and regulations in their use of language in social interactions.

- The meaning of words, phrases and sentences is conveyed in certain kinds of situative contexts.

- The speakers’ uses of language fulfil specific functions in and for these speakers’ communicative behaviour.
Pragmatics is the transdiscipline that studies these language- and culture-specific forms of language use.
In what follows I take up the point that *Pragmatics* is relevant for, and has predecessors in, other disciplines such as

- Philosophy,
- Psychology,
- Ethology,
- Ethnology,
- Sociology, and
- the Political Sciences

and briefly discuss a selection of core issues of *Pragmatics* that were introduced into the field via these six disciplines (see Senft 2014).
One of the central questions of philosophy is how we interpret our world and our lives as being meaningful, or more generally, how we generate ‘meaning’.

One of the most important tools we use to do this is language. And one of the most fascinating fields in linguistics is to study how speakers use their language to generate specific meanings in specific contexts. This is the interface where philosophy meets semantics and pragmatics.

One of the central questions here is:

*What do we do when we speak?*
The theory of **speech acts** developed by John Austin and John Searle and H. Paul Grice’s theory of **implicature and conversational maxims** are central in this field.

Their philosophical perspectives on language and speech understand speech acts as manifestations of language as action that – driven by intentions of speakers – causes effects and thus has psychological and behavioural consequences in speaker–hearer interactions.
Speech acts create accountability relations; thus they can be seen as a social pact between speaker and hearer which is based on conventions and requires social competence of the interactants. Speech has an eminent social contract function – as illustrated by the example below:

“I now pronounce you Man and Wife.”
Austin, Searle and Grice have shown that there is a difference between the way in which an utterance is used and the meaning that is expressed by this utterance in certain contexts and that speakers may say one thing that has a specific meaning but that also means something else in certain circumstances because of certain social conventions that are valid within a specific speech community.
Here the differentiation between direct and indirect speech acts becomes important:

A sentence like

*Can you pass the salt?*

is at first sight a question.

But we all understand that this question about a specific ability of a hearer is also a request addressed to the hearer.

Direct versions of this indirect speech act would be, e.g.:

*I request you to pass the salt.* (request)

*Pass the salt, please.* (grammatical imperative)
In Grice’s (1975) *Theory of Conversational Implicature* the adequate reaction of an addressee to indirect speech acts is explained by *the cooperative principle of conversation*:

“Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the state at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”

This principle is constituted by the four *maxims*:

*Quantity*  
*Quality*  
*Relation*  
*&*  
*Manner*

*(Grice 1975: 45f.)*
With the category of **Quantity** go the maxims:

- Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- Do not make your contribution more informative as is required...

With the category of **Quality** goes the supermaxim:

- Try to make your contribution one that is true.

With the category **Relation** goes the maxim:

- Be relevant.
And with the category **Manner** goes the supermaxim:

- Be perspicacious!

And various maxims such as:

- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief.
- Be orderly.

All these maxims can be violated or flouted.
However, for Grice these maxims serve the basis for figuring out the non-literal meaning of utterances – like indirect speech acts.

He claims that his theory is universal!
How do speakers of different languages refer to objects, persons, places, periods of time and even texts or text passages?

When speakers do this, they communicate in certain contexts, and these contexts shape our utterances.

Natural languages are context-bound, and the subdiscipline of linguistics that concerns how languages encode features of the context of utterances is called ‘deixis’.
Thus, when someone wants to know what is meant by a sentence like 

“He gave me this book yesterday”

s/he needs to know

• who uttered it,
• when and where,
• and to which book the speaker refers.

Deixis is the name given to the system of indexical forms and means that make these references, and, as illustrated by the sentence above, these indexicals are characterized by the fact that their use and meaning is completely context-dependent.
Languages differ fundamentally in how they make deictic references. The linguistic means available for spatial deictic reference, for example, encompass

- adpositions (at, on),
- locatives (here, there),
- directionals (towards, into),
- presentatives (here is, voilà).
- positionals and motion verbs (to stand, to go), and
- demonstratives (this, that).
In the languages of the world we find systems of spatial deictics that consist of

- two terms (English: here, there),
- three terms (Latin: hic, iste, ille),
- and more than three terms –
  - like Daga (spoken in PNG) with 14 terms,
  - and Alaskan Yup’ik with over 30 terms.
The most influential contribution on the topic of deixis was presented by the German psychologist Karl Bühler in the first half of the last century.

The term *deixis* is borrowed from the Greek word for “pointing“ or “indicating“.

We not only point with words, but also with *gestures*.

It is extremely interesting to research what forms of gestures people make, whether they are culture-specific and what their function is.
Gestures accompany speech spontaneously. Besides deictic or pointing gestures we can differentiate

- **iconic gestures** which present images of concrete entities or actions,
- **metaphoric gestures** which picture abstract content (e.g., displaying an empty palm to present a problem),
- and **beats** which rhythmically accompany prosodic peaks in speech.
- Moreover, there are also language-like gestures, the so-called **emblems** like e.g., “thumbs up” which are culture-specific conventionalized signs that are meaningful with or without speech.

- And there are even **‘pragmatic’ gestures** which perform conventional acts (such as betting, e.g.) in non-verbal ways.
We not only observe **co-speech gestures** which are primarily used for addressees and thus have a strong social component.

There are also **co-thought gestures** speakers produce just for themselves in problem-solving situations, especially in solving spatial visual problems, e.g., in mental rotation or paper folding tasks.

Thus gesturing can support thinking. That means that language, gesture and mind are strongly interrelated.

The study of deixis and gesture provides direct evidence for the fact that human interaction is **multimodal**.
Gestures are not the only expressive movements that function as communicative signals. There are many other **forms of expressive behaviour** that are used in human communication.

Human Ethology is a subdiscipline of biology that deals among other things with the communicative functions of all kinds of expressive behaviour.
Among the most communicative of such behavioural signals are facial expressions.

Territorial behaviour of humans expressed in personal distance, posture behaviour and body motion is another means of expressing communicative and interactional signals.
Human ethologists argue that expressive movements like those just mentioned have undergone distinctive differentiation in the service of signaling in phylogenetic and cultural **ritualization** processes.

They are usually
- simplified,
- repeated rhythmically,
- get exaggerated and
- have a specific intensity.

Thus they contribute to making the behavior of interactants
- predictable and thus
- provide security and order in interaction.

But not only non-verbal expressions are ritualized; these ritualization processes also and predominantly involve speech!
Ritual Communication (RC) can be defined as

... artful performed semiosis, predominantly but not only involving speech, that is formulaic, repetitive and therefore anticipated within particular contexts of social interaction. RC thus has anticipated (but not always achieved) consequences. As performance, it is subject to evaluation by participants according to standards defined in part by language ideologies, local aesthetics, contexts of use, and, especially, relations of power among participants. (Basso & Senft 2009: 1)

Forms of ritual communication can be located on a continuum or cline of structural, (con)textual and sociocultural complexity.
They include, for example,

access rituals, greetings and leave takings, jokes, dances, songs,
requesting, giving and taking, ritual offerings,
chants (e.g., in demonstrations or at the soccer stadium),
ritual insults, theatrical performances, salutations,
magical rites, shamanic rituals, worship, prayer, blessings,
rites of passage like, e.g., death, mourning and wedding rituals,
avoidance practices, healing rituals, leadership rituals,
ceremonial gatherings, public speeches, festivities,
etc.etc.etc

It is indeed a wide field for pragmatic research!
Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt claims that **rituals** and forms of **ritual communication** can be referred back to so-called **basic interaction strategies**. He differentiates four such conventionalized strategies:

- strategies of group maintenance and bonding,
- strategies of social learning and teaching,
- strategies of striving and
- strategies of fighting

and subclassifies them in a subtle way.

The forms of human interactive behavior vary enormously from culture to culture and they have to be learned, because all members of a group have to be on common ground to interact adequately with each other...

**BUT**
Eibl-Eibesfeldt claims that these strategies of social interaction share a universal pattern, based upon a universal rule system.

Thus the way people in different cultures try to acquire status, get a gift from someone, invite someone or block aggression follow in principle the same basic patterns.

Therefore many rituals and forms of RC can be traced back to, or at least understood as, the differentiation of this finite set of conventionalized basic interaction strategies.

(Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1989: 425-47)
One of the anthropologists whose linguistic insights became extremely influential in pragmatics was Bronislaw Malinowski.

For him, too, language was a mode of behaviour, a mode of action in which the meaning of a word or an utterance is constituted by its function within certain contexts.
He was especially interested in answering the question: What are the essential forms of language?

One of these forms is realized in what Malinowski calls **phatic communion**, a form of language use that has exclusively social bonding functions and thus does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas and expressing thoughts.  

(Malinowski 1936: 310ff)
However, with respect to Malinowski’s concept of phatic communion, John Laver (1975) points out that phatic communion is the detailed management of interpersonal relationships during the psychologically crucial margins of interactions. But this communicative behavior also includes posture, body orientation, gesture, facial expression and eye contacts and is more than ‘a mere exchange of words’.

Thus, phatic communion has also indexical functions with respect to the interactants’ status and social identity and may initiate routine exchanges that can be rich in information.
Malinowski was also very much interested both in universal features of language as well as in the **interrelationship between language, culture and cognition** that is expressed in culture-specific features and phenomena of languages.

This interest was shared by the linguist Franz Boas, one of Malinowski’s contemporaries. Boas’s student Edward Sapir took up his teacher’s cautiously formulated ideas about this interrelationship and together with his student Benjamin Lee Whorf he formulated the so-called **Sapir-Whorf hypothesis** about linguistic relativity with which they claim to answer the question: *What is the relationship between language and thought?*
Whorf came up with two versions of the linguistic relativity principle:

- the strong version claims that **language determines thought**, 
- whereas the weak version claims that **language influences thought**.

Our language and cognition group at the MPI for Psycholinguistics discussed and critically assessed this hypothesis on the basis of cross-linguistic/cross-cultural research on the conceptualization of space and spatial reference.
We found that the way in which angles are projected from the ground in order to locate a figure plays a crucial role for spatial reference.

There are three frames of spatial reference

1.) Relative systems are dependent on the speakers’ viewpoint. Localisations are derived from their position and orientation.

The sentence

*The ball is to the right of the man.*

is understood from the speaker’s point of view; it completely neglects the orientation of the man.
2.) Intrinsic systems utilize inherent, intrinsic features of an object to derive a projected region or to anchor the spatial reference to an object.

The sentence

*The ball is to the man’s right.*

is understood as follows: A man is an object with a front, a back, a left and a right side. This sentence refers to the position of the ball on the basis of the orientation of the man.

The ball is at the right side of the man; the orientation of the speaker does not play any role whatsoever.
3.) Absolute systems operate on absolute concepts of direction. They are based on conventionalized directions or other fixed bearings that can be derived from meteorological, astronomical, or landscape features. In these systems we find sentences like:

The ball is to the west of the man/
uphill from the man/
seawards from the man/
downriver from the man/
etc.

The three frames of spatial reference

- Relative
  - “He’s to the left of the house.”

- Intrinsic
  - “He’s in front of the house.”

- Absolute
  - “He’s north of the house.”
All three frames of reference can be found in a given language, but most languages seem to prefer one of these systems.

We formulated the following hypothesis:

If speakers of a language preferentially use one reference system in a particular spatial domain, then these speakers will rely on a comparable coding system for memorizing spatial configurations and making inferences with respect to these spatial configurations in non-verbal problem solving.
A number of experiments were devised and carried out based on the principle illustrated below:
These experiments verify the hypothesis with respect to the interrelationship between verbal and non-verbal coding of spatial configurations and thus the strong interrelationship between language, culture and cognition.

Our results support the hypothesis that language contributes in shaping thinking for non-verbal problem solving instances, however, it still remains problematic to argue that it is only language that influences thought in general and that this influence is unidirectional.
Malinowski, Boas and Sapir emphasized that language must be studied in its social context. Thus, it goes without saying that whoever wants to investigate the interrelationship between language, culture and cognition must know how the speech community being researched constructs its social reality.

Researchers need to be on common ground with the communities they want to research.

To achieve this aim, the *ethnography of speaking* approach founded by Dell Hymes (1978) provides a useful, though complex framework.
Dell Hymes introduced the notions of **speech style** and **speech or communicative event** and argued that the meaning of an utterance can only be understood in relation to the speech event in which it is embedded.
Analyses of these styles or events require the minute study of, and the interrelationship between, what he called components.

He grouped these components into the following eight main entries that could be remembered with the acronym SPEAKING:

situations, participants, ends (goals), act sequences (message form and content), keys (manner in which something is said), instrumentalities (forms of speech), norms and genres of speech styles and speech events.

Hymes understood this list of components as a first set of questions and possibilities in the study of “ways of speaking” in specific speech communities with the aim to reveal the rules that guide the communicative behavior of members of the researched community and thus to explore the communicative competence of its members.
Following Dell Hymes ideas about an ethnography of speaking and in the vein of Joel Sherzer‘s (1983) attempt to present such an ethnography in his classic volume “Kuna ways of Speaking“ I have presented a typology of the Trobriand Islanders‘ speech community‘s ways of speaking that are expressed in specific metalinguistically differentiated varieties which are constituted by metalinguistically labeled genres or text categories (Senft 2010).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situational-intentional varieties</th>
<th>Genres</th>
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| Biga tommwaya biga baloma  
Old people’s speech; speech of spirits of the dead | wosi milamala - songs of the harvest rituals |
| Biga megwa  
Magic speech | megwa - magical formulae |
| Biga tapwaroro  
Language of the church | tapwaroro - Christian texts  
wosi tapwaroro - church songs |
| Biga taloi  
Greeting and parting speech | taloi - greeting forms and forms for opening speeches |
| Biga pe’ula / biga mokwita  
Hard words / true speech | yakala - litigations  
kalava - counting baskets full of yams  
kasolukuva - mourning formulae  
liliu - myths |
| Biga sopa  
Joking or lying speech, ‘indirect’ speech | sopa - joke, lie, trick  
kukwanebu sopa - story as joke  
kasilam - gossip  
wosi - songs  
butula - mocking songs  
vinavina - ditty  
sawila - harvest shouts  
matua* - some insults |
| Kena biga sopa kena biga mokwita  
Either joking speech or true speech | Kukwanebu - story  
kavala - personal speech  
luavala - admonition -kasemwala - propositioning/seducing -nigada - requesting |

Note: matua ‘insults, swear words’ in general are “bad speech”

Situational-intentional varieties of Kilivila and their constituting genres
(Thanks to Nick Enfield for his help in designing this tablet)

Can be only biga bwena “good speech”

Can be either biga bwena “good speech” or biga gaga “bad speech”
• **Pragmatics and sociology**: Everyday social interaction

In the 1960s and 1970s the research of three North American sociologists had a strong impact on the understanding of human everyday face-to-face interaction in general and on the understanding of communicative behaviour and language use – especially in conversation – in particular.
With his theories, observations and insights in, as well as ideas about, the presentation of self in everyday life, social encounters and forms of talk, Erving Goffman was one of the extremely influential sociologists of this time.

He proposed to call the sub-area of sociology which studies social interaction *the interaction order*. 
Goffman pointed out

- that social interaction constitutes an institutional order with **norms, rights and obligations** that rule and regulate the interactants’ conduct and behaviour;

- that there are **procedures and conventions** regulating rights and obligations that provide interactants with **rules and rituals** for ‘playing’ their interaction ‘game’;

- that the rules are **based on social contract** and **social consensus**;
that participants in interactions are aware of the norms valid in their society and that they cooperate in maintaining the ritual and moral ‘interaction order’ of their social life, and

that the study of interaction must consider the whole social situation, the specific contexts in which they are rooted and on which they depend.
Harold Garfinkel pioneered his *ethnomethodological studies* on social order, on everyday ‘common sense’ knowledge about social structures, and on reasoning in social action and communication, by researching how we make sense of our social world.

He is famous for his ‘breaching experiments’ in which he instructed students ‘to engage an acquaintance or friend in an ordinary conversation and, without indicating that what the experimenter was saying was in any way out of the ordinary, to insist that the person clarify the sense of his commonplace remarks’ (Garfinkel 1963: 220ff).
What follows documents one such interaction (Garfinkel 1967: 44):

The victim waved his hand cheerily.

S: How are you?

E: How am I in regard to what? My health, my finance, my school work, my peace of mind, my...

S: (Red in face and suddenly out of control.)

I was just trying to be polite. Frankly I don’t give a damn how you are.
Garfinkel’s (1967: 36f.) explicit aim with these experiments was to make ‘commonplace scenes visible’ by starting ‘with familiar scenes’ and then ‘make trouble’. These experiments revealed that ‘interactants hold themselves and one another morally accountable for the “accommodative work” through which they make sense of their circumstances’ (Heritage 1984: 84).

He showed that members of a community use commonsense practices and shared rules of interpretation as a means of practical reasoning to constitute, understand and make sense of their social world.
Influenced by Garfinkel, but also by Goffman, Harvey Sacks developed the field of *Conversation Analysis (CA)* – in close cooperation with Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson – to research how conversation is ordered and structurally organized.

The field of CA has been developed in sociology departments and still seems to be more strongly rooted in this discipline than in departments of linguistics (although this has changed somewhat in recent times).
Researchers working in this paradigm have shown that conversation in interaction is a highly – and probably universally – ordered and structurally organized activity ‘in which participants co-construct meaning and social action in an exquisitely timed choreography of interlocking communicative moves’ (Mark Dingemanse [p.c.]).

The understanding of the meaning of these moves in specific speech communities, however, requires cultural knowledge.
John Heritage (2003: 3) assesses the role of Goffman, Garfinkel and Sacks and his co-workers – especially Schegloff – as follows:

Goffman insisted that social interaction is to be conceived as a social institution in its own right, with its own normative organization and moral obligations, which, in turn, are linked to other aspects of the social world through face, role and identity ... Goffman conceived social interaction as the product of a set of moral rights and rituals – a ‘syntax’ as he put it ... irreducible to individual psychology. It was his conception which ... mandated the study of social interaction – what Goffman later termed the “interaction order“ – as a subject matter in its own right.
Garfinkel’s researches developed the proposition ... that shared understanding and mutual intelligibility among humans are possible only through approximate, revisable ... practical and shared methods of reasoning whose results are unavoidably inscribed in courses of social action ...
Building from these perspectives, CA focuses on the competencies which persons use and rely on to co-construct orderly and mutually understandable courses of action. Accepting John Austin’s supposition that we “do things with words“, CA has developed a program of research by mapping the resources with which the members of the social world produce, recognize, understand and manipulate social interactions. Its basic assumption is that while the resources for the construction of conduct are highly institutionalized ..., they also serve as the building blocks for highly particularized courses of conduct, and for specifically meaningful activities fitted to the singular characteristics of particular persons and contexts.
The 1960s were a highly politicized decade which saw a strong rise of Marxist ideas and other left-wing ideologies. Social inequalities and clashes between social classes came to the fore of the general political discussion and they were taken up in the scientific discourse, especially within the humanities.
In 1959 the British sociologist and former teacher Basil Bernstein published a paper in which he differentiated between a ‘public’ and a ‘formal language’; later he used the expressions ‘restricted’ and ‘elaborated code’ which children learn in their sociocultural environment.

He claimed that children who are only socialized in a restricted code are limited in their communicative skills; usually these children are members of the lower classes; on the other hand, children who acquire and are socialized in an elaborate code are verbally skilled speakers who can deal with all kinds of communicative situations; usually these children grow up in middle class families.
Bernstein’s research had not only political but also pedagogical consequences, both in Europe and in North America. A number of so-called ‘compensatory’ education programmes were developed and carried out, like the Operation Headstart programme in the USA.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Bernstein’s theory on the interrelationship between language, social class and education and the compensatory education programmes were heavily criticized.
This theory, which was referred to as the **deficit hypothesis**, was confronted with sociolinguistic approaches that were referred to as the **difference hypothesis**. The most prominent representative of this latter approach was **William Labov**.

Labov argued that compensatory programmes were doomed to fail because they were ‘designed to repair the child, rather than the school’; on the basis of his linguistic research he pleaded to change the institution ‘School’ so that school education could offer equal opportunities to all pupils, regardless of their social class background.
He emphasized that a proper understanding and assessing of the verbal skills of lower class children, especially of Black lower class children in the urban centres of the USA, needed research into how they use their language in their social contexts. It is only there that one can gather adequate cultural knowledge based on participant observation and proper linguistic data which enable linguists to detect the rule-governed grammatical structure of these children’s vernacular. Labov first called this vernacular

**Non-standard Negro English**

and later

**Black English Vernacular,**

**Afro-American (Vernacular) English**

and finally

**African American Language.**
In a number of studies Labov described the structure – the grammatical and semantic rules – of AAL.

He impressively illustrates not only the creative power of the grammar of the language spoken by the Blacks in South Central Harlem, but also the ‘great verbal skills’ its speakers display, for example in ritual insults that are ‘well-organized speech events which occur with great frequency in the verbal interaction of black adolescents ... and occupy long stretches of their time’ (Labov 1972: 305).
Despite their low level of achievement in school, the Black adolescents who get engaged in ritual insults show (off) their highly-developed linguistic competence and capabilities within this form of interaction with members of their peer group.

These expert speakers of AAL have even developed a language ideology which excludes, segregates and denounces individuals whose Black English language variety is closer to Standard English than to the Black English spoken in the vernacular culture. This means that they understand their vernacular as an emblem of social identity.
In his monograph on “*Ideology in Language Use*”, Jef Verschueren (2012: 7) points out that ‘... ideology is associated with *underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation.*’

One of the definitions Verschueren (2012: 10) provides for “ideology” runs as follows:

We can define as ideological any basic pattern of meaning or frame of interpretation bearing on or involved in (an) aspect(s) of social ‘reality’ (in particular in the realm of social relations in the public sphere), felt to be commonsensical, and often functioning in a normative way.
Verschueren (2012: 17) then points out that “[One of] the most visible manifestation[s] of ideology is LANGUAGE USE or DISCOURSE, which may reflect, construct and/or maintain ideological patterns”.

I will illustrate this concept of language ideology with an example from the Solomon Islands in Oceania.
Christine Jourdan (2007) describes and analyses the urban modalities of language use by residents of Honiara, the multilingual capital of the Solomon Islands, where more than 70 languages are spoken. She shows that contact has affected urban definitions of self and identity.

In recent times, the colonial hierarchy, with English – the official language – at the top and local vernaculars and Solomon Pijin – the lingua franca – at the bottom, has been reorganized.

Honiarans now use different language varieties to index their position in the urban world, to indicate ethnic identities and to illustrate their social sophistication.
Honiarans have constructed a hierarchy of languages which is context-dependent:

• if they want to emphasize their ethnic selves, the vernaculars are placed on top;

• if they want to index their gendered selves, Pijin and vernacular come first;

• and if they want to index that they are young urban people they stress Pijin as the language for daily interaction and English as the language of social advancement.
Thus, the language ideology that was dominant in pre-colonial times characterized by reciprocal multilingualism and the language ideology that was dominant in colonial times characterized by linguistic hegemony and hierarchy have both been replaced by multiple ideologies which compete with one another.

These insights are crucial for a sound analysis of language use in Honiara!
Thus, language varieties not only mark group membership and solidarity, and therefore have also important bonding functions, they also index a speaker’s position within her or his speech community with respect to social rank; moreover, they also segregate others who lack an adequate command of the verbal skills that are characteristic for the group members’ verbal interactions.

Language use and language ideology are crucial for the creation of sociocultural identity and normative for the regulation of social relations between specific speech groups in public interactions.
Future developments in Pragmatics: A brief outlook

In their programmatic essay


Sachiko Ide, William Hanks & Yasuhiro Katagiri point out:

“It is our shared conviction that pragmatics as an analytic enterprise has been dominated by views of language derived from Euro-American languages“.

Together with a gradually growing group of other researchers they want to “break free from the constraints of established paradigms and to multiply the sources of theory...
... They see their approach to pragmatics as ‘emancipatory’ ... in the sense of freeing analysis from the confines of theoretical orthodoxies grounded in dominant thought and practice“ (Hanks et al. 2009: 2).

Their project is interdisciplinary & transdisciplinary with the focus on X-linguistic & X-cultural differences of language use and multimodal interaction between members of the speech communities being investigated. The publications of the members of this movement provide interesting examples for this new direction in pragmatics.
Concluding remark:

The characteristic features of some of the core domains of the discipline I presented in this talk provide ample evidence for the fact that linguistic **pragmatics** is indeed a ‘**transdiscipline**’ that brings together and interacts with a rather broad variety of other disciplines within the humanities.

These disciplines share with pragmatics the fundamental **interest in human social (inter)action** and the **joint creation of meaning**.
References: This power point presentation is based on Senft (2014).


