PRAMGATICS AND ADEQUACY

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1. Introduction

Sheffer in his 'Anatomy of enquiry' (1964) attempted to evaluate several approaches to confirmation theories. In order to justify his own amendation he rightly stressed the importance of adequacy conditions. Any theory can be amended in many different ways. Elaborations are possible of certain aspects. The question always is why to choose this approach and not the others. It is evident that the theories are up to a certain extent determined by the esthetical properties of the systems, the simplicity reached, etc.

But we can savely say that it has been one of the major results of Sheffer to have shown that simplicity — and we dare to generalise this idea to the esthetic dimention as well — is language dependent and even more importantly that the language structure and proper-ties (at least in its lexical realisation) is dependent on the earlier experiences, successes, failures, and their embodying in the language. Sheffer has given very beautiful illustrations and decessive argumen-tations on this account.

As already stated, one could generalise Sheffers point of view to the esthetic values of theory. This is, certainly the case if one makes a Birkhof-approach to esthetics. In this well known approach esthetics is structure dependent. In this perspective we could say that because theories are always represented and produced in a symbolic system, the esthetical value of a theory will be dependent on the structure of its representation. A structure which again is dependent on the symbolic properties of the system and therefore of the former experiences.

But it is clear that besides the simplicity and esthetic evaluation criteria there exist others. Most importantly we have here to mention the criteria who evaluate qualitatively and/or quantitatively the efficiency of the theory. To what extend does the theory do its job. Does it describe, explain, the behaviour of objects, the processes it is intended to describe, in a way it is expected ? Does it be helpfull to ameliorate the handling or development of these objects ? Does it make possible predictions on certain behaviour and processes and so on ?

Taking into account the remarks of Sheffer on the experience relativity of simplicity and its generalisation to esthetics, it is clear these last type of criteria are finally not that different from the former ones.

Both types are finally criteria of efficiency. The first type however measures efficiency of much more sofistication and even of a much more general type. For we believe simplicity and esthetical values are rather general criteria of efficiency, taking into account their dependency on rather large symbolisation systems, embracing most, if not all of a certain culture.

Taking all that into account and the mass of litterature on linguistic theories including several competitive pragmatic theories, why not bring forward the question on the adequacy requirements of pragmatics ? What do we expect a pragmatic theory to perform, in what way ? Under what conditions we are prepared to call a pragmatic theory successfull, eventually partly successfull ? A clear consciousness of these conditions can help to direct the further efforts for the construction and elaboration of new theories, for ameliorating old ones, eventually to put aside certain approaches which proof sterile vis-à-vis the adequacy requirements.

Eventually the discussion of adequacy requirements can help to solve or at least direct attention on the problem of the relation between the field the study is intended to cover and the neighbouring fields. Applied on pragmatics this means that eventually the study of adequacy requirements for pragmatics, can be of relevance for grasping the relation and interrelations between semantics and pragmatics. This could happen f.i. by confronting the adequacy requirements of semantics with these of pragmatics.

Anyway we agree with Sheffer that for a scientist it has very much importance that again and again he considers his adequacy requirements for his endeavours, for the theory he wants to construct.

Evidently we have to add that the adequacy requirements, as Sheffer underlines, indicate only tendencies in and aspects of our evaluation of the relevance of theories for a certain topic.

It is however important to take into account that these set of adequacy requirements are self in continuous movement, that eventually they even can be inconsistent. So it can not be the purpose of a scientist to construct his theory so that it gets a maximal score for all the adequacy requirements introduced. Not at all. Nevertheless it is very important to be conscious for which adequacy requirements which is a certain society or culture are related to a domain of study, a certain theory scores well and for which it does not. This will also permit better to understand the value of competing theories which eventually try to score well in different adequacy requirements. How much sterile quarreling could not have been switched into functional collaboration if one has seen the complementary aspects of ones efforts in the same domain. And this is not just true for the several domains of philosophy, but even more so in science.

In this perspective we think it is justified to pay some attention to the introduction of some adequacy requirements for pragmatics and to some discussion of it. But before going into that, it looks us important to have a look into the variety of studies which are covered by the term pragmatics.

2. The pragmatic field

A traditional but still very useful description of the pragmatic field is given in Carnap (1959) : "If in an investigation explicite reference is made to a user of a language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics... If we abstract from the user of the language and analyse only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. And if, finally, we abstract from the designata also and analyse the relations between the expressions, we are in syntax. The whole science of language, consisting of the three points mentioned, is called semiotics... Exemples of pragmatical investigations are : a physiological analysis of the processes in the speaking activities, a psychological analysis of the relations between speaking behaviour

and other behavior; a psychological study of the different conno-
tations of one and the same word for different tribes, different
groups, social strata; a study of the procedures applied by scientists
in recording the results of experiments etc...' (Carnap, 1959, pp.
8—10).

When we look today this is a 40 years later to what has been
realised in this pragmatic field, we see even more variety then what
Carnap already sketched at that time.

We believe that today the field of pragmatics comprises the
following :
a) the study of the subjective relation between the listener or speaker
and particular utterances (believe, acceptance, assertion, presuppo-
sition). These relations can be studied in a descriptive, or in a norma-
tive way (the rational speaker or listener) (cfr. Martin, 1959). F.i.
if A beliefs p; dies he also believe q, were p and q are related to each
other in a particular way.
b) the study of the relation between language sequences and action
or in a more specific way (this is already an interpretation) the study
of the relations between changes produced by linguistic means in
particular semantic models and the action of an individual and vice
versa (Kotarbinski, Morris, 1946).
c) the study of the changes produced in an individual (cognitive
semantic or other changes) by the act of producing or hearing certain
specific utterances (the speech act, or listening act). This study
includes a) the Searlian Pragmatics as well as b) the study of the
Freudian solving of neurotic conflicts by the patient himself by ex-
pressing those in language.
d) The study of the relations between the language in use and the
specific society of the language users.
In what way and to what extent is the language in use shaped by the
peculiar society. Is the language system one of the ways by which
cultural information (group knowledge : know how, economical,
moral, social rules and attitudes (cfr. Dubarle 1980) is stored ?
e) The study of the individual breakthrough of the borders and
limitations of the groupknowledge model as it is crystallized in a
certain specific language system including the properties of the use
of language and the consequent language changes following such
breakthroughs.
The role of metaphor in poetics and science is in this respect im-
portant. Is the development of formal languages (jargons in different

sciences) in this perspective a straightforward example ?

3. Some adequacy requirements for a pragmatic theory

An adequacy requirement which we meet in several pragmatic theories is the decency-requirement. A pragmatic theory has to determine which utterances are decent. We meet this requirement in Van Dijk (1978) as well as in Searle (1969).

This decency gets with Van Dijk a sociological definition. Moreover, for Van Dijk, pragmatics is a subdiscipline of sociology (Van Dijk, 1978, pp. 15). Pragmatics has to determine conditions following which speechacts become decent in a certain context (Van Dijk, 1978, pp. 16, 146, etc.). These conditions must be formulated in terms of the mental and social structure of the communicative content.

Searle's decency approach following Chomsky is rather in terms of rational psychology and belongs in that way exclusively to this field. This difference in approach to decency has for sure very important and interesting methodological and epistemological consequences but we will not go into this matter.

So one adequacy requirement which one has to take into account is that a pragmatic theory has to describe, to predict and eventually to explain decency and deviation from decency for speech acts.

One question however we have to formulate here, is the following : Is the decency determination of speech acts a central task of pragmatics or is it rather a peripherical task ?.

The answer on this question can perhaps best be founded by studying Van Dijks defence of the decency approach. Decency of speech acts, Van Dijk says, correspond with the 'success or failure of acts (Van DIjk, 1978). If this correspondence is true, then let us see how important 'success' and 'failure' is for action theory and let us look if there are no other eventually more important adequacy-criteria for action theory. If other more important ones can be found in action theory, does there exist corresponding adequacy-criteria for pragmatics ?

As far as the first question on action theory is concerned, it is clear that although success and failure of an action is important and this is the more true for applied action theory, it cannot be the purpose of an action theory, just to describe, to explain these actions which are successfull. The successfullness of an action is a property which is up to a high degree independent of the action or combination of actions which are performed and therefore certainly it is outside the domain of a pure action theory.

In a pure action theory, what is central is a) the systematisation of actions, b) what action can be combined with another action, c) what can validly be deduced from a certain action eventually in a certain context, what actions are equivalent to some other actions, what actions does another action imply ?

We see that for pure action theory it is much more important to characterise validity of interrelations, than success and failure. The problem now is to determine if for pragmatics validity can and has to be differentiated from decency and if validity is the most important adequacy requirement ? In other words, does an adequate pragmatic theory have to describe the valid interrelations between speech-acts ? A third question and perhaps the most important is : what does validity mean here ?

It is evident that answering this last question is not an easy but certainly a necessary task. Anyway decency seems to be an important but nevertheless only a limited aspect of a more general task or duty of a theory of pragmatics. To introduce the notion of, validity here as the general adequacy requirement seems attractive if a nice interpretation for it can be introduced. Validity we propose to interpret in terms of utility. However utility not taken in the strict praxiological sense but rather with its large philosophical meaning. Utility in this sense can be differentiated in epistemic, economic, psychological, social, or esthetical utility. This possible plurality and differentiation perhaps indicates that with this interpretation of validity, we have got a rather important and fructual basis for the evaluation of a pragmatic theory.

Each act, and particularly a speech act has to be usefull. A pragmatic theory has to describe, to explain, to predict the use of a certain speech act or combination of speech acts taken into account a certain type or types of utility. The decency notion of

Van Dijk and Searle attracts attention just on a specific type of social utility. It is evident that such an approach is not only interesting but also important. However it is evident to the same degree that this type of social utility is as such only one aspect of language use.

Speech acts can and regularly are made which violate general decency rules. Such use of language has also to be described and studied. More importantly such use which seems irregular from the decency point of view, can be very regular from f.i. an epistemic point of view. Goffman's strategic rules (Goffman, 1970) are very beautiful exemples of the epistemic point of view in speech acts. Epistemic utility of a speech act is the utility of an act to inform or to conceal information (negative epistemic utility). In Goffman's pragmatics, we have an analysis of speech acts in terms of 'Unwitting move, naive move, control move, uncovering move and counter-uncovering move. The conditions for each such a move, their properties, their combinations and possible implications are all very important. Their study is evidently very interesting.

Much of Goffman's moves are irregular from the decency-pragmatic point of view (f.i. they transgress the sincerity conditions). Nevertheless they are very important and meaningfull language facts. They have to be studied. Evidently other types of epistemic utility structures can and have to be introduced for pragmatics. In science f.i., the Goffman epistemic utility and not the decency approach seems very relevant. We see regularly that science and its language transgresses the social decency rules. Also on verbal behavior. We see even sometimes under impuls of science that the decency rules are changed. F.i. look how the evolution laws of Darwin have changed the views on man, the talk about man and the decency of the way of talking about man (cfr. the conflicts between the church and scientist). What is then the epistemic utility structure of science ? This is a very interessant topic.

A psychological utility approach of pragmatics we rather get in the psychoanalytical occupations with language, f.i. in the works of Lacan and so we can go on relating the main trends in pragmatics with the search for and study of a certain type of utility of speech acts (logical, antropological, behaviouristic, economic utility etc.)... In this sense we believe that the validity approach in the sense of utility brings us a very interesting adequacy require-

ment for pragmatics and so the basis for an adequacy theory of pragmatics. It not only permits to describe the different approaches in the pragmatic field it also explains and evaluates them.

This last remark is very essential. Criticisms can perhaps be introduced against the validity approach (decency included). just because of this normative aspect. This tendency to introduce normativity in the description of phenomena is typical for the starting point of the study of the human being as an individual or as a social being. And we find that the descriptive and the normative aspects of such studies are most of time intermingled. It is with much difficulties that sometimes a discipline can free itself of such normative behaviour. We see that this happened in certain parts of psychology, sociology, linguistics and even economics.

What happens then is that the evaluation in the study disappears. What rests is description, explanation and prediction. Even if it is true that at certain stage (f.i. in applied science) this evaluation is necessary reintroduced for the sake of orienting the different choices which have to be made. Perhaps that in function of the presence or absence of such explicit evaluation aspects, the differentiation between applied and pure science can be made — a differentiation which,as we all known, is much questioned.

Applying all this to pragmatics, we could put forward that in an even more pure version of pragmatics, also this explicit evaluations of speech acts must disappear. *Adequate pragmatics has to describe, explain and predict the behavior of the language users in so far as their behavior is related to the language use*. The behavior to be explained and predicted can be, but need not be language behavior. This point was already illustrated in the overview of the pragmatic field. It is also evident that if such a type of adequacy requirement is formulated, it will ne necessary to devote much more attention to the situations (its social and physical aspects) in which the behavior is to be explained and predicted. The rational psychological approach to pragmatics is in this view not much promising, because it neglects the description of accicental aspects of the context In practice this is just fundamental for the orientation of actual behavior, which eventually transgresses all types of a priori norms in function of an adaptation to the actual context, in order to give an adequate response, for the survival. An adaptation which for most being, justifies the transgression or at least the enlarging of the inter-

pretation of all norms, rules, conventions.

In this perspective, what proves much more efficient is the approach of the behavior of the language user and his context in terms of the main actors (his opponents), and their main activities which are going on (main activities in terms of priorities for the actors at a certain moment). A description of a situation along these lines we call a register : In this paper, we do not want to go into this register-approach to pragmatics. We have done this already in different publications (Vandamme, 1977, 1979, 1980). Rather we want to bring into the fore two important levels of approach which are important, when one tries to reach an adequacy for pragmatics centered on explanation and prediction of behavior. This levels are — we believe – the macro and the micro level.

But before going into this we still want to make an — in our view — important point. When the explication and prediction of actual verbal action and non-verbal behavior related to this, is the aim, and not the normation of it, then all kind of aspects, operations and phenomena become central which are neglected in a normative approach. We think for instance to the phenomenon of metaphor. Metaphorical use of language is rather the rule and non-metaphorical use is rather the exception. In the normative approach, one neglects these aspects of language or treats them rather peripherically. This illustrates how a normative approach to language very quickly produces artifacts and obscures more than it explains. In this perspective it is perhaps a much better hypothesis to approach the normative behavior in language use, rather as a peripherical phenomenon which is important in order to reach certain secondary goals in communication so f.i. to reach a certain social position. In everyday language use, one is much more opportunistic. The language user goes on from one system to another system without much problems as long as he can get a gain for his momentary goals.

Let us now return to the micro and macro level of language use. In the macro level one has to study the relations between the several registers. We have here two main types of relations dependent on the diachronic and the synchronic dimension. In the synchronic approach, we study how at a certain moment two or more registers are combined together, or are fused together. In the diachronic approach we study how from a certain register or combination of

registers, one is switching over to another register. One can construct here a chart of possibilities and even probabilities of normal sequences of registers for a certain actor or set of actors. For instance, after fighting, that is a certain type of behavior, including verbal and non-verbal action and therefore one can construct a register on it, one can expect the activity (another register) of explaining the behavior to his friends or presumed sympathisers.

An interesting application of these principles of macro analysis are to be found in P. Van de Sype's (1980) "Politieke taal — een register benadering" and Van Hove's dream analysis (1981). Van de Sype analyses the language used in two proposals for a law concerning abortion in the Dutch parliament (1974—1975). He differentiates in these texts the different basic functional processes; registers and studies the interrelations and interconnections between these components. The main registers he introduces here are : a) a ritual register, b) a normative register, c) an historical register, d) a rhetorical register, e) a descriptive register. Some of these registers are divided into subregisters. There are also interesting functional relations which he describes.

Vanhove (1981) makes a macroanalysis of dreamstories. He brings to the fore the different registers composing certain dreams and he makes use of the peculiar properties of their combinations to differentiate a dreamstory from other narrative styles (f.i. fairy tales). This is a very important result reached by the register pragmatics.

As far as the micro analysis is concerned, what has to be looked at is how in a specific register (or a synchronic fusion of a set of registers) a certain unit (word, utterance, sentence, non-verbal action, etc.) functions, what changes it causes in the structure, etc. A beautiful illustration of such a micro study, is the pragmatic description of questioning in a teacher-pupil interaction during an arithmetic lesson. Suppose the pupil is talking without permission to another child. The question of the teacher to the child : "How much is 5 + 4" ? is not only a device for obliging the child to pay attention to the lesson, but also a hierarchy constructing and controlling device. The question here is more a means to realize a certain structure in the teaching setting, rather then a means to evoke a certain intellectual response and development.

4. Conclusion

In this paper we have strongly urged for an emancipation of pragmatics from some narrowminded normative approach of language use. It is very important that also pragmatic frees itself from the several traditional normative approach to language. Most authors try to reintroduce some old normative structures as far as language use is concerned into a new methodological form. Pragmatics in its descriptive and in its pure form (this last has to be based on a systematisation of sets of descriptive pragmatics) has to explain and to predict actual (this rather in descriptive pragmatics) and possible (this is so in pure pragmatics), verbal and related behavior. This interpretation and elaboration of pragmatics has been neglected too much. The reason for such a neglect has been that language behavior has too much been approached from a priori categories and a priori normation. In such an approach the norms (even hypothetical ones) have been looked at as more important than the facts, in a more classical jargon, competence (even if it proved a pure artifact and wishfull thinking) was more important than performance. This trend must be reversed !

NOTE

I like to thank J. Deman for his comments.

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