



Kate Scott: Review of *Pragmatics Online*

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Digital online technologies have radically transformed the ways in which people communicate, challenging long-held assumptions in linguistics and communication theory, such as the distinction between the roles of author and reader. A variety of academic fields and theoretical perspectives have looked at emerging communication practices in online contexts, such as communication studies, anthropology, or information science. Kate Scott's new book *Pragmatics Online* adds to this rising field of research as it examines how we can understand online communicative behavior using a general theory of communication and pragmatic analysis. The book highlights the differences between online and offline communication considering the context in which it is conducted. Each chapter opens with a brief outline of the contents and ends with a summary of the main points and a reference list. Many examples illustrate the different approaches and areas of inquiry, making it easier for the reader to comprehend the concept of language use in online contexts. This book is suitable for both undergraduate/postgraduate students and scholars who intend to do research on digitally mediated communication, and contains both theoretical and practical aspects.

The purpose of chapter one is to introduce the general field of pragmatics by highlighting how interpretations are influenced by the context in which they are produced and understood. A review of speech act theory and relevance theory is followed by a discussion of how face-to-face communication differs from digitally mediated communication. The frameworks reviewed (in particular those by Baym 2000; boyd 2010) are part of a broader media-linguistic debate on genre formation in online environments (see Jucker and Dürscheid 2012) and enable readers to gain a more nuanced understanding of how digital resources affect the production and interpretation of communicative acts.

Chapter two explores the nature of online contexts in greater detail and introduces the concepts of context collapse and imagined audiences. In online contexts,

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one message may be accessed by many individuals, all of whom interpret it differently. Communication online therefore requires navigation and management of this collapsing of contexts. Because users often cannot predict their online audiences, the chapter stresses the need for users to construct their messages for an imagined audience. The author identifies a range of strategies for navigating collapsed contexts and imagining audiences appropriate to the social, cultural, and linguistic contexts in which users are communicating.

Online content sharing is discussed in chapter three. Drawing on boyd et al.'s (2010) categories of motivations for retweeting as well as on Barton and Lee's (2013) classification of 'Facebook liking', both sharing and liking are considered as ostensive communication acts that increase expectations of relevance. Retweeting, reblogging, or sharing third-party material entails attributive utterances that may acquire relevance based on the information, the attitude or on social connections. However, as the author highlights, online content sharing is always context-sensitive and interpretation is subject to inference.

Chapter four discusses the various ways in which users can employ tagging techniques in order to communicate via and within social networking websites. Based on previous Twitter and social media research, the author details a range of pragmatic tagging functions that contribute to the significance of the utterance by guiding readers in their inferential processes.

The use of non-verbal means in contexts of digital communication is covered in chapter five. A variety of examples illustrate how online platforms have been used for non-verbal communication by co-opting and modifying their specific affordances and constraints. Emoticons or non-standard spelling can for example be used to soften the impact of a complaint, or simply to acknowledge that a humorous message was received. When inferring the overall meaning of a message in digitally mediated communication, readers need to process non-standard spelling, punctuation and image-based resources relating to the discourse context. Similar to offline communication, non-verbal cues guide the listener's inferences as she/he forms an interpretation of what the speaker meant to convey.

Memes are the subject of chapter six. Based on previous research into memes, it considers the defining characteristics of memes and identifies some of the most prevalent types of memes including image macros, object labelling memes, and phrasal template memes. Taking a closer look at the so-called Distracted Boyfriend meme, it can be seen how these types of memes serve as metaphors using multiple modes of communication. In the same way as verbal metaphors, they can convey a wide array of weak implicatures.

Chapter seven examines what is known as clickbait – headlines that are designed to attract users' attention and encourage them to click. It explores hyperbolic clickbait qualities using a corpus analysis that compares clickbait headlines with non-clickbait headlines from a quantitative point of view. The many examples in this chapter demonstrate that clickbait headlines are carefully crafted pieces of writing that create an information gap that is difficult to ignore.

The last chapter provides a critical discussion of the research methods used in this book. Theories of pragmatics provide a framework for making predictions about the behaviour of interlocutors in a variety of on- and offline contexts. Various

data-driven methods for testing these predictions are presented in this chapter, such as free production and judgment tasks, user surveys and corpus analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion of some of the ethical and diversity-related issues involved in research into the pragmatics of digitally mediated communication.

To conclude, students and scholars can use the book as a helpful resource when planning a research project on language use in online contexts. Throughout the book, emerging communicative behaviours in digitally mediated environments are identified and analysed. A chapter on how artificial intelligence, such as chatbots or voice assistants, succeed and/or fail in imitating human language use could have further enhanced the work and our critical understanding of online pragmatics. This is only a minor point, since readers will have access to more specific studies on the use of digitally mediated language in the bibliographical sections of each chapter.

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