Review

Pragmatics in Chinese Culture (3rd edition)
Guanlian Qian (2020)

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Reviewed by Juan Chen

Pragmatics in Chinese Culture (3rd edition) authored by Guanlian Qian is a monograph that expands the mainstream pragmatic theories from the perspective of the socio-humanistic network deeply rooted in Chinese culture. It builds on the first and second editions, which were published in 1997 and 2002 respectively. This new edition has been enriched, supplemented, and revised in various ways. Characteristically, this book of eight chapters is a major attempt to explore pragmatic issues within the Chinese socio-humanistic network and to set up a framework of pragmatics on the basis of Chinese culture and linguistic facts.

Chapter 1 'Introduction' is a theoretical interpretation of pragmatics and Chinese cultural pragmatics, which lays the theoretical foundation for the whole book. The author argues that general pragmatics, which originated from western languages and cultures, is incapable of dealing with quite a few particular kinds of communicative acts or discourses in Chinese context such as Zen Koan (i.e., paradoxical anecdotes or riddles used in Zen Buddhism to provoke enlightenment). In contrast, *Pragmatics in Chinese Culture* deduces from authentic Chinese data some pragmatic principles, maxims and strategies that could truly fit the Chinese culture. The emphasis on the major or even decisive impact of Chinese culture on the formation and operation of the pragmatic principles, maxims, and strat-

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egies constitutes a distinctive feature of this book. In this chapter, the author proposes that pragmatics as a functional theory of language use needs to be based entirely on extra-symbolic relations (i.e., human intervention into language) and be complemented by two systems outside language itself, namely human beings and human society. Based on this idea, he defines pragmatics both narrowly and broadly. The former studies how language users interpret the implied meanings other than the literal meaning of the utterance by considering the participation and intervention of a cluster of semiotic signs, context, and human intelligence; the latter studies how language users understand and use speech with the intervention of a cluster of semiotic signs, context, and human intelligence. As the focus of narrowly defined pragmatics, the meanings beyond the literal one or what the linguistic signs carry are often permeated with Chinese cultural and aesthetic characteristics. In this regard, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* authored by Liu Xie in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (386–589 CE) could be considered the earliest work on pragmatics in China. Liu's view on discourse, the author claims, is a bona fide Chinese cultural view of pragmatics, in which the interpretation of Chinese aesthetic principles and the coherence of discourse auxiliaries to the text are specific to Chinese culture.

In Chapter 2 'The Intervention by Contexts', the author mainly discusses how contexts constrain the use of linguistic signs and contribute to the interpretation of discourse. The author claims that contexts play an ontological role in pragmatics. They can be divided into linguistic and extra-linguistic contexts. Among them, the implicit extra-linguistic contexts, i.e., social culture, customs, behavioural norms, values, historical events, and others, constitute the socio-humanistic network on which human beings depend for their living. Every word we say is subject to this socio-humanistic network. For this reason, the author proposes that pragmatics can be referred to as "speechology in socio-humanistic networks", which is also the subtitle of this book. It should be noted that this emphasis on the constant constraints of socio-humanistic networks imposed upon human communication is in sharp contrast with the mainstream pragmatic theories. As the author demonstrates, contextual intervention is mainly manifested in clarifying the meanings of deictics, filling in the gaps or adding the specific premises for sentences, explicating implicit performatives, inferring conversational implicatures, and so forth. More importantly, through a large number of culturally specific conversations in Chinese, the author illustrates that the meaning of words, sentences, and even discourses can be much enriched with the intervention of contexts or, more exactly, the Chinese socio-humanistic network in daily communication.

Chapter 3 discusses how the cluster of semiotic signs accompanying speakers participates in communication and discourse interpretation. This cluster

consists of all the extra-linguistic signs involved in real-life communication that accompany and pertain to people, including voice and breath, facial expressions and gestures, and other accompanying objects. Voice and breath, as the physiological foundation of human speech, serve to transmit the speakers' intention to utterances. Gestures and facial expressions make manifest the speaker's attitude and emotion by way of adding particular pieces of information to utterances, confirming the truthfulness of the information, coordinating between the topic and utterances, clarifying ambiguities, and so on. Accompanying objects refer to things that the interlocutor deliberately prepares or carries in order to invoke particular meanings when speaking. All of them are symbolic in nature, as they are permeated with speakers' intentions and actively participate in verbal communication. The author further claims that the coordination between these sign-clusters and utterances is the key to successful communication. He points out that, although they should be thought to be indispensable for pragmatics, they have not yet been fully addressed.

Chapter 4 addresses the intervention by human intelligence in interactive communication. The author illustrates that purely formal pragmatic inference does not work well in real-life communication since it requires the intellectual involvement of human beings. Intellectual intervention is a reasoning process in which the interlocutor exploits common-sense judgments, world knowledge, and interpersonal relations to attain the "appropriate feeling" of the communication, i.e., the implied meanings conveyed in utterances (p. 143). The role of intellectual intervention is to sort out vagueness, remove redundancy, eliminate ambiguity, fill in meaning gaps, and finally, to arrive at the targeted speaker meaning from utterances. The author also points out that intelligence is especially crucial in understanding Zen dialogue, which is designed to be mysterious and intangible from the conventional reasoning of their utterances. In some cases, the speaker, namely Zen Master, when answering questions raised by the Zen disciples, may stage unexpected reactions, such as "shouting, beating, brushing, caning and burning" (p. 160), or answer with no words but several special Zen actions, such as "chanting Buddha, meditating and holding mantra" instead (p. 162). The author proposes that the interpretation of these special pragmatic strategies that occur in Zen conversations relies heavily on intellectual reasoning. He then calls for pragmatics researchers to break the confinement of linguistic signs and to direct pragmatic inference towards four aspects: the utterance itself, the extra-linguistic signs accompanying it, its context, and the interlocutors' intelligence. This view echoes the macropragmatic perspective (Verschueren, 1999), which, to this day, has not been sufficiently discussed in current pragmatic studies.

In Chapter 5, the author proposes his definition of pragmatic principles and strategies by challenging the Gricean view of the Cooperative Principle. He

argues that everyday conversation is not maintained by the assumption of the Cooperative Principle, but rather driven by the Goal-intention Principle. Here, goal is the general purpose of communication; intention points to specific sub-goals in each conversational turn. With the global goal of communication, the speaker will break it down into "local intentions" and integrate them into each turn of the conversation (p. 167). Only in this way can the conversation go on smoothly. Pragmatic strategies are driven by the intention and meanwhile determine the successfulness of the conversation. Among them, the strategy of "appropriateness" is the most important one. It refers to saying the appropriate words to the appropriate people at the appropriate time and on the appropriate occasion. The establishment of the Goal-intention Principle characterises the author's profound appreciation of verbal communication in the context of the Chinese humanistic network. In addition, he summarises a total of 15 pragmatic strategies that are not touched upon in Western mainstream pragmatics literature, such as refusing praise overtly, suppressing compliments falsely, denying facts on the surface, among others. Drawn from authentic Chinese culture and data, they are completely in conformity with Chinese culture.

In Chapter 6, the author points out that his pragmatic theory can be readily applied in at least three domains, namely, syntax, literature, and translation. He raises his doubts about the lack of linguistic investigation of Zen Koan and goes on to propose that Zen dialogues, as well as other communicative acts, can also be explained by means of the communicative formula: "Verbal Communication = Mixed Cluster of Semiotic Signs + Context Intervention + Intellectual Intervention". In this way, Zen Koan, i.e., Zen masters' words (or even deliberate silence) plus the uttering pattern, can also be considered valid speech acts. They can be understood by recourse to the speakers' voice and breath (e.g., shouting or scolding), facial expressions and gestures (e.g., whipping or caning), and the accompanying objects (e.g., sticks or brooms), together with the participation of the context and the hearers' intelligence. This indicates the powerfulness of his formula in explaining special verbal communications as well as regular conversations.

In Chapter 7, the author tries his pragmatic framework in conversation analysis and concludes that it fits well with his broadly defined pragmatics and emphasises again the crucial role of the context in conversation. The author also discusses various models of turn-taking and how the negotiation of interlocutors in topic-shifting contributes to the coherence of the conversation.

In Chapter 8, the author reiterates that pragmatics should be thought of as speechology in socio-humanistic networks, as human communication is always subject to the network of social relations, cultural traditions, moral standards, behavioural norms, and physical environments. Moreover, he points out that the choice of pragmatic strategies, verbal or non-verbal (i.e., voice and gestures),

are driven by social goals, such as constructing one's social identity or fostering interpersonal relations, not just for linguistic reasons. This is where, the author stresses, his theoretic framework differs from the Western view of pragmatics as a study "between language and people" but not "beyond language and people", which tends to overlook the critical role of societal factors underlying speech acts.

As an exemplary work of Chinese scholars' endeavour in academic exploration for pragmatics, this book differs from Western classical pragmatic works such as Levinson (1983), Mey (1993/2001), and Huang (2007/2014) in at least the following three ways.

Firstly, the book represents a cultural approach to pragmatic theorising. As is remarked by the author, "the ideal Chinese cultural pragmatics should be an integrated blend of Chinese culture and pragmatics, from data to terminology, from pragmatic principles to pragmatic strategies. All of these should be grounded in the nature of Chinese culture" (p. 3). He completely breaks away from the theoretical approach and analytical framework of Western mainstream pragmatics, as indicated by his wide-ranging quotations of both ancient and modern Chinese literature works, authentic examples of daily conversations in Chinese and his profound understanding of Chinese culture from bureaucracy to street smartness. By drawing on ancient Chinese scholars (e.g., Liu Xie, Confucius, Zhuangzi, Cao Xueqin, Lu Xun, et al.), he generalises some language-specific pragmatic tenets, principles, and strategies from the facts of Chinese culture and Chinese language, based on the assumption that the vitality of a language is dependent on the cultural richness and creativity of the language community (Li, 2021). In this regard, this book is a valuable work of pragmatics nurtured by Chinese culture. Particularly noteworthy is the distinctive pragmatic strategies he has theorised from the Zen Koan dialogues steeped with Chinese wisdom through ancient Zen practices. They exemplify the author's endeavour in breaking the constraints of the Western theoretical system of pragmatics and establishing a unique theoretical pragmatics framework with Chinese characteristics (Chen, 2018).

Secondly, the author highlights the pivotal position of socio-humanistic networks in pragmatics. He argues that interactive communication is not a transmission of information only by means of linguistic signs, but also dependent on a cluster of simultaneous extra-linguistic signs. Moreover, it is argued that contextual and intellectual interventions also play an important and even decisive role. These innovative ideas enrich the content of pragmatic research and substantiate pragmatic explanations.

Thirdly, the book is remarkably abundant with minute details of linguistic data, as most of the data come from recordings of authentic conversations or transcripts of daily communication. Apart from the usually documented contextual information, the book also annotates the interlocutors' facial features, body pos-

tures, voice or breathing ways to fully exhibit the actual situation of verbal communication. Hence, the analyses and arguments in this book are quite subtle and viable.

In short, this monograph is innovative in content, rich in data, and coherent in development. Thus, it is a worthy book for researchers and students in pragmatics or related fields.

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