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This is a contribution from *Language and Dialogue* 2:3
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BOOK NOTICES

Korta, Kepa and John Perry. 2011. *Critical Pragmatics. An inquiry into reference and communication.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 192 pages. Hardbound. ISBN 978-0-521-74867-1

Reviewed by Eckard Rolf (University of Muenster, Germany)

Critical Pragmatics is the product of a transatlantic cross-fertilisation: Kepa Korta is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of the Basque Country. John Perry, who co-authored *Situations and Attitudes* along with Jon Barwise, is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Riverside.

The approach Korta and Perry advocate emphasizes three ideas: getting the first idea from Austin, they regard language as action. Getting the second idea from Grice, they are focused on communicative intentions; and getting the third idea from Perry (himself), they distinguish between two kinds of truth-conditions: reflexive and referential. The latter distinction manifests the idea that utterances “have different levels of truth-conditions or contents, depending on what one takes as fixed and what one allows to vary” (p. 5).

Combining Austin’s and Grice’s ideas, Korta and Perry arrive at two results:

First, that the *speaker’s plan* — what the speaker intends to say and do by making the sounds he does — should be a basic unit of study in pragmatics. [...] The second result is that what language provides [...] and what semantics systematically treats, are *ways of acting* and in particular *ways of disclosing one’s intentions* to others. (p. 5)

The book to be reviewed contains fourteen very informative and highly distinguished chapters, nine of them deal with different problems of reference.

Chapter 12 is devoted to the difference between semantics, pragmatics, and ‘critical pragmatics’. The boundary between semantics and pragmatics is drawn with the aid of two accounts of ‘semantic content’: raw and refined.

We call utterance-bound or reflexive content, given only the meanings of the words involved, without resolution of ambiguity or reference [...], ‘raw semantic content’. Given resolution of ambiguity, we have what we call ‘refined semantic content.’ (p. 142)

The basic idea here is that semantics provides the hearer with raw semantic content, while pragmatic reasoning is needed to arrive at refined semantic content.

In approximately the last 20 years, different approaches have been discussed in order to offer the best description of the meaning of sentences containing

quantifiers, sentences such as ‘I’ve invited everyone.’ Uttering sentences of this kind the speaker intends to convey, for example, that she has invited *everyone in the building* she lives or works in. Normally, the meaning of the quantifier is restricted to the context of the utterance. There are different ways of explaining this.

The contextualist would argue that there is a domain of people in the building that is available in the context of the utterance to serve as an unarticulated constituent of what is said. The proposition expressed, i.e. what is expressed by the utterance

is arrived at through a combination of semantics — the meanings of the words used — and *near-side pragmatics*, which picks out the relevant domain [...] for the interpretation of ‘everyone.’ Near-side pragmatics involves not only saturation, the resolution of reference, but also enrichment, the provision of new content not available from the meanings of the articulated words. (p. 144, italics added)

The literalist, the semantic minimalist, for example, eschews unarticulated constituents and other forms of enrichment. The literalist insists that what is said (strictly and literally) turns out to be that the speaker invited everyone in the whole world, so that far-side pragmatics, in this case Gricean considerations, have to take over.

Korta and Perry adopt a position situated in between: *Critical Pragmatics* intends to provide “candidates for the output of semantics, raw and refined content, that should please the minimalist, without offending the insights of the contextualist” (p. 145). *Critical Pragmatics* maintains that there is a proposition that is determined simply by the meanings of the words used. Call this proposition ‘the utterance-bound content’ or ‘refined semantic content.’ Basically, this is the proposition that there is an X the speaker is talking about and that there is an y the speaker is talking about and that the speaker has invited everyone in X to y (cf. p. 145).

From semantics, so conceived, one arrives at “what is said by the usual process of going from reflexive to referential content, without an implausible circuit through false propositions and strained Gricean reasoning” (p. 146).

Ultimately Korta and Perry arrive at the following characterization of the approach they portray:

With minimalists and contextualists alike we admit that near-side pragmatics has an important role to play in determining what the speaker says in uttering a sentence. That is why our approach might be adequately rendered as radically minimalist — regarding semantics — and moderately contextualist — regarding pragmatics. (p. 146)

Critical Pragmatics is an original and highly impressive contribution to the field of pragmatics. It is a must-read for anyone who is interested in pragmatics in general and meaning in particular.

References

Barwise, Jon, and John Perry. 1983. *Situations and Attitudes*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

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About the reviewer

Eckard Rolf is Professor at the Department of Linguistics of the Institute of German Philology at the University of Münster (Germany). He is the author of several books, including *Metaphertheorien* (Berlin 2005), *Symboltheorien* (Berlin 2006), *Sprachtheorien* (Berlin 2008), and *Der andere Austin* (Bielefeld 2009).