Book Review: *Critical Pragmatics: An Inquiry Into Reference and Communication*

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What is This?

Book Reviews

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Korta, K., & Perry, J. (2011). *Critical Pragmatics: An Inquiry Into Reference and Communication.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press. 178 pp. ISBN 978-0-521-74867-4

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This book is a detailed examination of three important discussion topics within philosophy of language. The authors' concern is twofold: First, what is usually studied under the scope of semantics should be studied within pragmatics, since utterances are actions. Second, there needs to be an utterance-bound theory, and subfields of linguistics such as pragmatics, semantics, phonology, and so on, should be united under this theory. In addition to suggesting these two important points, they also construct a theory of reference and cognition. The authors neatly, and very patiently, unpack their points throughout the book and demonstrate how their theory works with different examples, approaches, and problems faced by the philosophy of language.

In the first chapter, the authors provide a sketch of the three main topics they will be covering throughout the book: "language is action," "communicative intentions," and "reflexive versus referential truth-conditions." The first idea, in which they follow Austin, involves two main points: we accomplish certain things with our utterances and these actions are never made in isolation—they are always embedded in a larger context in which the act takes on different meanings as the context changes. The second topic's inspiration comes from Grice, whose "idea was that the meanings of phrases and contents of utterances derive ultimately from human *intentions*, and in particular a special sort of intentions, communicative intentions" (p. 4). The authors suggest that basics of communicative understanding should be based on discovering the speaker's intentions and such study should be situated within pragmatics, instead of semantics. They recognize the contestation between coding/decoding versus intention discovery, that is, a structural approach versus interpretation of the intention reconstructed using contextual cues. While authors do not immediately "pick a side," they reveal their positions as a combination of the two ideas: "We use the coding model to arrive at what is said; then intention discovery takes over" (p. 5). The third and last topic the book covers is "reflexive versus referential truth-conditions," which they later call "content properties" (p. 150). This idea, the authors suggest, goes back to Hume and conveys the notion that conjunction of content forms the basis for observational knowledge. They call this "constraints; they require that if one type of situation occurs, so does another"

(p. 6). In addition to neatly laying out the basics of the three main topics of the book, the first chapter also provides a short introduction to other subareas to which the authors hope to contribute, namely, theory of utterance and singular reference.

The second chapter gives a thorough, important, and very useful historical background on the issue of singular reference within the field of philosophy of language. While it is not possible to cover the whole range of historical debate between philosophers of language in a single paragraph, it is important to mention a few essential points. The authors start their overview of history from the late 19th and early 20th century philosophers: Frege and Russell. They summarize Frege and Russell's perspective as such: "They thought that ordinary proper names are not, as Mill thought, simply tags for objects, but instead or in addition incorporated something like abbreviations for descriptions" (p. 17). Post–World War II philosophy of language—including philosophers such as Austin, Urmson, and Strawson—focused on the shortcomings of Frege and Russell, namely, the study of ordinary language. Through the debates that stretched until the end of 20th century, the "core of contemporary referentialism" was founded on Donnellan and Kripke's argument—which suggested that "ordinary proper names were rigid designators; that they expressed propositions about particular objects, and that the mechanism of reference was causal, and did not require a backing from descriptions" (p. 19). The authors end this chapter with a discussion of Kaplan's study of indexicals, character, and sentences-in-context.

In the third chapter, the authors expand their take on pragmatics, action, role-management, signs, and Grice. As they mentioned in the first chapter, the authors expand on what they mean by action as nested within the context of a whole range of other possible actions and circumstances. Roles, a way in which we organize information and relations, are essential to author's understanding of action. They suggest that "roles are often significant because they are involved in constraints, the laws, principles, rules, conventions, and other regularities that provide the structure within which we perceive and plan" (p. 28). In other words, they argue that roles provide circumstances in which actions can be constrained and interpreted. The last piece of the puzzle, then, is the realm of signs and information. The information of an action, embedded within a certain role, needs to be interpreted through signs. The authors bring all of this information together in their interpretation of Grice and the communicative intention. The intended action assumes roles, which are embedded in circumstances. In short, the authors suggest a nested view of communication, starting from the premise of action, and explaining how actions fit within roles, semiotic structures, and intentions.

In the fourth chapter, the authors lay out their theory of reference. They write "the heart of our account of reference is an analysis of the intentions" (p. 40), and they examine intentions under four categories that they call the GDTPA (grammatical, directing, target, and path intention) structure. The *grammatical intention* refers to the implied intention when the speaker tweaks the grammatical structure, such as active versus passive voice. The *directing intention* is a speaker's use of a reference to direct its hearer's attention to that particular referenced object. *The target intention* is about the speaker's aim to impart additional information to the listener about an object. The

path intention is the speaker's plan to realize the action he has in mind, by the virtue of roles and signs. The authors finish this chapter with examples regarding how the GDTPA structure works.

In chapters 5 through 9, the authors apply their theory to singular references: demonstratives, indexicals, names, and definite descriptions. Each chapter is dedicated to one concept. This gives the authors the necessary space to expand on that concept and discuss the ramifications of their theory for that specific reference example. In each chapter, the authors start by providing a description and a brief history of the exemplified notion. Then, they apply their GDTPA structure to various examples in each chapter. This becomes especially important in a work of philosophy of language, in which the previous chapters are dedicated to theorizing. Needless to say, the examples they provide, and their in-depth articulation of these examples bring a much appreciated sense of concreteness to their theory, and concepts.

In chapter 9, the authors expand on "implicit references and unarticulated constituents," utterances that seek to complete or add on to the information already available in the context. An example the authors mention is the sentence "it is raining." The location, time, or properties of rain are unarticulated, since in most daily usage such information is readily available in the context. They distinguish between three types of unarticulated constituents: unarticulated and grammatically incomplete; unarticulated, grammatically complete, but referentially incomplete; and unarticulated, even though grammatically and referentially complete. To finish this chapter, they engage a theory that argues utterances can be decontextualized, and therefore, unarticulated constituents are myths. The authors respond by saying that utterances, in fact, cannot be free of intent *or* context.

For chapters 10 to 12, the authors discuss important pragmatic issues from the perspective of their own theory. In the 10th chapter, they examine locutionary acts, and in the 11th chapter they consider reference and implicature. Within the 12th chapter, the authors offer their take on the border mainly between semantics and pragmatics, as well as other subfields. Primarily, in the 10th chapter, the authors juxtapose their two main influences: Austin and Grice. Consequently, instead of locutionary acts, they make a case for locutionary content. They differentiate the concept of locutionary content from Austin's locutionary act, and from Searle's propositional content, as well as from Grice's concept of *what is said*. In the 11th chapter, they take their point on Grice even further. While Grice's conception of what is said and implicature is quite comprehensive, the authors consider it on the level of utterance and suggest

> the very production of any utterance whatsoever, or even a noise that might be mistaken for an utterance, triggers a search for an explanation of what the speaker might be doing, and what, if anything, he is trying to convey. (p. 138)

Throughout the 12th chapter, authors argue that the positions of pragmatics, semantics, and other subfields should be united under an umbrella theory of utterances.

In the concluding chapter, the authors bring all the information together and discuss content properties, propositions and the structure of action, and coding and classification.

They conclude by stating that utterances should be taken as actions, and subcategories of linguistics, therefore, should be unified under a theory of utterances.

Despite the through and detailed approach of the book, there is one substantive limitation. Throughout the book there is an overemphasis on cognitive science. The authors construct their theories and explain human behavior using cognitive concepts. The availability of other approaches based in interactionism, such as discursive and narrative psychology, renders their approach rather narrow.

Overall, Korta and Perry's *Critical Pragmatics* is an important resource for those who interested in the philosophy of language and reference and its intersection with cognitive science. They offer insightful solutions to important problems within semantics and pragmatics. Their backgrounds as logicians help them construct their arguments and theory with great precision. In addition to very useful neologisms, their theory offers an important outlook to the important questions surrounding philosophy of language.

Author Biography

Ali E. Erol is a PhD candidate at Howard University's Department of Communication and Culture. His dissertation focuses on developing a social theory called the *internarrative state,* where he criticizes and suggests an alternative social structure of the nation-state using theories from communication, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, and literature. He is further specializing in intercultural communication, rhetoric, mass media, and social influence. He frequently publishes in Turkish mass media and popular online journals on political discourse and cultural criticism.

Why do young adults lie? How can adults detect young adult deception? Taylor and Gonza's (2011) *Deception: A Young Person's Life Skill?* addresses these important questions. This book is guided by three overarching issues: First, the authors use a developmental approach to address what predicts the use of deception and deception success in adolescence as defined in this book as the "period of life between 10 and 21 years of age"; second, this book explores strategies and tactics practitioners can use in an attempt to detect deception and foster more effective intergenerational communication; finally, the authors argue for the use of a holistic, skills-based approach to understand communication in general (not just deceptive communication; p. 2).