



Review

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Laurel J. Brinton, *Pragmatics in the history of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xiv + 256. ISBN 9781009322874 (pb).

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Pragmatics in the History of English ‘is intended as an accessible and comprehensive overview of developments in one field of English historical linguistics, historical pragmatics’ (p. xi), and the book achieves this aim brilliantly. It is indeed a rich and well-documented source of central concepts, approaches and lucid accounts of earlier studies and debates presented with pedagogical skill that serves a wide scope of potential readers, including students, teachers and researchers alike.

The book consists of nine chapters, the first two laying the background. Chapter 1 (pp. 1–17) describes and defines the field of historical pragmatics as ‘the study of pragmatic phenomena in earlier stages of language’ and ‘the study of ways in which pragmatic phenomena change and develop over time’ (p. 16). The field’s origins are placed in the mid 1990s, and it stems from changes in pragmatics and linguistics: the scope of pragmatic phenomena studied expanded to include pragmatic forms, interactional pragmatics and domains of discourse. At the same time, the earlier emphasis on invented and collected oral conversations shifted to any language data as a source of pragmatic research (p. 5). Differences and similarities in comparison to two related fields, namely historical sociolinguistics and historical linguistics, are also discussed.

Chapter 2 (pp. 18–43) gives a useful overview of central concepts, such as form-to-function and function-to-form approaches, describes the ‘bad data’ problem and explains core methodologies, including corpus pragmatics. The three subfields of historical pragmatics are introduced as ‘historical pragmatics (proper)’, ‘diachronic pragmatics’ and ‘pragmahistorical linguistics’. The first approach studies pragmatic aspects of a text or period, the second focuses on pragmatic change over time and the third deals with discourse-pragmatic factors motivating language change (pp. 18–21).

These introductory chapters set the scene for the rest of the book and give historical background to the field and its development, which makes it possible for a newcomer to grasp what historical pragmatics is about in theory and practice, and learn who has played a key role in the field. For a more experienced scholar, the chapters serve as a useful amalgamation and interpretation of key issues and studies. Brinton, of course, builds on her own expertise and previous contributions, but she also brings research of other scholars together to paint a comprehensive and systematic picture of historical pragmatics up until now. The works of Andreas Jucker, Thomas Kohonen, Irma

Taavitsainen and Jonathan Culpeper are, understandably, particularly widely cited, but the list of references is admirably diverse and balanced.

Chapters 3–8 each pick a specific pragmatic phenomenon and follow the same outline including an introduction, thorough presentations of the phenomena and earlier research, chapter summaries of main points, suggestions for further reading with the author's comments and self-study exercises.

Chapter 3 (pp. 44–71) focuses on pragmatic markers and characterizes them as 'syntactically independent, grammatically optional words, clauses, and phrases with little or no conceptual meaning that are frequent in oral discourse' (p. 66), and explains how they differ from other short forms such as interjections, backchannel devices and so on. Theoretical discussion focuses on processes of change. While fully compositional, lexical constructions are generally accepted as sources of pragmatic markers, their diachronic development as either lexicalization, grammaticalization, pragmaticalization or cooptation is still a disputed matter. Brinton makes her position in the debate admirably clear 'with grammaticalization favoured over lexicalization, pragmaticalization, and cooptation if an expanded definition of grammar is accepted' (p. 67). Here and in other chapters, the exercises give readers a chance to work with historical as well as Present-day English texts. Basic exercises practise recognition and interpretation of pragmatic functions in a specific passage, often Shakespeare, Chaucer or other classic texts, whereas the most advanced ones encourage readers to use corpora and conduct their own research. For example, looking at *whatever* in the *Corpus of Historical American English* (COHA), identifying its earliest use as a pragmatic marker and possibly reconstructing its grammaticalization path could even serve as a potential thesis topic.

Chapter 4 (pp. 72–101) deals with speech representation from Present-day English categories of speech and thought representation to the development of forms, reporting verbs and quotation marks in the history of English. In Old and Middle English thought representation is absent or infrequent, whereas direct and indirect speech can be found from earliest texts onwards. 'Over time, we can see increasing frequency of thought presentation over speech representation, a change from more indirect... to more direct... ways of presenting speech and thought, and an expanding use of specialized reporting verbs and speech evaluators' (p. 97). One of the key discussions concerns the development of free indirect discourse (FID) as the expression of consciousness especially in novels, resulting in conventionalization of the form in the nineteenth century. The chapter also includes the most recent developments, as do most other chapters, introducing quotative uses of *go*, *be like* and *be all* and scholarly debate surrounding the origins of *be like* (pp. 96–7).

Chapter 5 (pp. 102–28) on politeness introduces the main theoretical approaches to politeness and impoliteness, and through case studies on compliments versus insults and thanks versus responses to thanks it discusses changes in conventions of politeness through the history of English. Camaraderie politeness characterizes the most recent developments and relates to broad social changes including the individualism and democratization, informalization and colloquialization as well as increasing diversity

and multiculturalism of today's society (pp. 124–5). A useful hint for those looking for a less explored research area can be found on page 117, and it concerns thanking in the history of English. The most common function of thanks in Present-day English is to bring a conversation to an end, a function that was rare in Early Modern English, where elaborate ways of thanking typically expressed gratitude and feelings of obligation (pp. 117–18).

Chapter 6 (pp. 129–55) on speech acts is a good example of methodological challenges in historical pragmatics, especially if form-to-function mapping and corpus pragmatic approaches are used. This is because speech acts are expressed with open-ended linguistic expressions rather than with specific, easily identifiable performative verbs, like *I command* for a directive function. Moreover, the performative verbs used in earlier periods are hardly the same as today and therefore difficult to identify comprehensively, and they often carry multiple meanings. The solutions proposed include function-to-form mapping and traditional philological close-reading of texts, which can be used first to compile the inventory of possible realizations of a specific function, which can then be searched for in a large corpus. Another proposed technique includes annotating a corpus manually for speech acts (p. 133). This chapter and other chapters contain well-chosen summaries of key points in concise tables and illustrative graphs that also serve as good examples of presenting information and results for student readers. These often come from or are adapted from previous research, such as a list of performative verbs expressing directives from the fifteenth century to the late nineteenth century (p. 137) or strategies performing directives indirectly (p. 138).

Address terms in chapter 7 are defined as 'forms used by the speaker to denote the intended hearer of an utterance' (p. 156) and include nominal terms of address and second-person pronouns (see pp. 156–84). The fundamental and complex change in the second-person pronoun system shows how power, intimacy, age, rank and interactional status among other factors contributed to the choice of the Middle English pronoun *thou/you*, and how the loss of *thou* and the spread of *you* took a somewhat different path in various genres. Even though Present-day English has no T/V pronominal distinction, the system of nominal terms of address is rich and complex. First names are becoming increasingly common and are the norm, whereas honorific titles have declined and become marked (pp. 171–2).

The title of chapter 8 is 'Discourse: Register, genre, and style' (pp. 185–214). Hence, it looks above the level of the sentence paying attention to a stylistic drift in the history of English from literate to oral style, with examples from religious discourse and the recipe genre. Here, as elsewhere, Brinton refers to the concepts introduced at the beginning showing how the three approaches of historical pragmatics can be applied to the study of genres. Historical pragmatics (proper) looks at 'the structural and linguistic characteristics of a genre at a particular time' (p. 188), diachronic pragmatics focuses on 'changes in genres over time' (p. 189) and pragmahistorical linguistics explores 'the role of genre in linguistic change, for instance how changes may occur earlier or more frequently or not at all in certain genres rather than others' (p. 189).

Chapter 9 provides a summary and future directions (pp. 215–27). Brinton sees possibilities for further study in many areas. The general themes raised concern the further development of second-generation corpora with more sophistication needed in pragmatic analysis and the spread of historical pragmatics in the study of more languages. Interesting is also the need for re-evaluation of some of the current terminology and blurry distinctions, such as form-to-function and function-to-form mapping, which is not always clear-cut and easy to make, and the subfields of historical pragmatics (proper) and diachronic pragmatics, which overlap, as pragmatic markers like any linguistic forms are in constant flux (p. 221).

Read as a whole, the book is an extensive, advanced-level course in historical pragmatics, but chapters can be read independently depending on one's interests. Single chapters provide an entry point for a student looking for a thesis topic or a comprehensive presentation of a specific pragmatic phenomenon in the history of English, but they are also reliable and thorough surveys of earlier research for any scholar. Many of the pragmatic phenomena, such as politeness or address terms, are recognizable based on everyday experiences of interactions and could even provide material and ideas for increasing linguistic awareness in English classes in both native-speaker and learner contexts.

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