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A comprehensive source of 2000 keywords in pragmatics

Yan Huang. 2012. *The Oxford Dictionary of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

This impressive, single-authored A-Z reference book begins with the unavoidable question asking “What is pragmatics?” (p. 1). In his preliminary answer, the author (Yan Huang, who is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Auckland) explains that pragmatics is simply “the study of language in use”, even though this very concise definition might seem unsatisfying (p. 1). In order to apprehend and articulate this concept in many dimensions, Yan Huang revisits in a few pages the different conceptions of pragmatics: from the Anglo-American tradition to the European, “Continental camp” (p. 8), plus many emerging variations of macro-pragmatics that include computational, experimental, societal pragmatics, and psycholinguistic pragmatics (p. 9). This opening section is quite rich, nuanced, and engaging (pp. 1-19). Of course, a few other definitions of pragmatics and many more substantial developments are provided as well in the following pages (p. 241).

All the basic terms of pragmatics can be found in this single book organised in a A-Z system (pp. 21-327). For example, “semantics” are defined by Yan Huang as the studying of “meaning in abstraction from speakers’ intentions, their psychological states, the cultural and social aspects of and the contexts in which linguistic expressions are used” (p. 280). Then, “semiology” is introduced as “a general science that investigates ‘the role of signs in social life’, of which linguistics including pragmatics is a part” (p. 281). Elsewhere, the definition of “culture” provided here is quite nuanced: “the way of life of a particular people, community, or country. It includes the attitudes, beliefs, customs, behaviours, myths, arts, sciences, languages, modes of perception, habits of thought, and social organizations of that people, community, or country” (p. 79). Many philosophical terms are brought as well, like “hermeneutics”, corresponding to “the art, theory, science, or methodology of interpretation” (p. 138). All these examples are just excerpts taken from longer and more detailed entries. Most entries are brief but numerous (over 2000 terms are gathered here), with countless definitions plus many lesser-known terms, subfields, and subcategories such as “pragma-dialectics”, presented here as “a normative approach to the study of argumentation” (p. 228), or “pragmantax”, seen as “a hybrid approach to the pragmatics-syntax interface” (p. 229). Indeed, one can find here about one hundred variants and countless related terms derived from “pragmatics”, including “critical pragmatics” (p. 77), “cross-cultural pragmatics” (p. 78), “neo-pragmatics” (p. 204), “neuropsych pragmatics” (p. 205), “pure pragmatics” (p. 254), “sociopragmatics” (p. 288), and many others. However, I could not find an entry for “semiopragmatics” as conceived by French theoretician Roger Odin; but there is a short

entry on "semiotics pragmatics" derived from American philosopher Charles Morris, even though this is not exactly the same concept (p. 281). Of course, most readers and experts in the field will never be satisfied since they are always asking for more contents whenever they read reference books; therefore, I would have liked to find a specific entry on "narrative" and another one for "storytelling", but I guess one has to appreciate what is already available in such a comprehensive book instead of seeking something else. Nevertheless, among the missing concepts in this book are: "propaganda", "misinformation", "disinformation", and "ideology". Perhaps these important terms can be added in a second edition someday. Incidentally, a paperback version of this book is planned for 2015.

While there is no entry as such for "symbol", we find one entry for "symbolic use" (p. 296). There are no "post" terms such as "postmodernism" or "post-structuralism", but interestingly, we find a definition for "postcolonial pragmatics", presented here as "a sub-branch of intercultural pragmatics (or cross-cultural pragmatics) which studies the use of the language of the colonizers in a postcolonial society" (p. 227).

Some selected names of experts in pragmatics appear here and there, but not systematically: we find for example individual entries for U.S. sociologist Harvey Sacks (1935-1975), Canadian-born sociologist Erving Goffman (1922-1982), British philosopher Peter Frederick Strawson (1919-2006), and British theoretician Herbert Paul Grice (1913-1988), but there are no entry for eminent names like Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, or Noam Chomsky (although we have a mention about "Chomskyan module", p. 48, and also some allusions to Chomskyan concepts such as "competence", p. 56).

Unfortunately, this extensive book has no index and no appendices, except for its generous bibliography (pp. 329-336). In this case, the inclusion of an index would have been particularly useful to locate in just one place (or in a single list) the various theories related to pragmatics that cannot be found alphabetically in a single page (because these expressions linked with theories do not always begin with the word "theory"). Among those numerous pragmatic theories, we find for example the "causal theory of reference" (p. 46), "correspondence theory of meaning" (p. 76), "Discourse Representation Theory" (p. 94), "global theory of a conversational implicature" (p. 132), "performative theory of truth" (p. 220), or the "Segmented Discourse Representation Theory" (which is not allowed an entry here). Most of the abovementioned theories are presented in various sections of this book but nowhere altogether on the same page, which would have been helpful.

The author's style is often straightforward, for example in his concise description of "cross-cultural communication", presented here as the "communication between speakers from different cultures or societies" (p. 78). Some emerging trends in pragmatics are included as

well, for example in the entry on “cyberpragmatics”, related to whenever “Internet-mediated interactions are analysed mainly from a cognitive pragmatic point of view” (p. 79).

With his Oxford Dictionary of Pragmatics, Yan Huang proves he is a champion for forging clear definitions and for highlighting the differences between terms and concepts, a rare quality that is not given to all scholars. It seems he conceived all these definitions as there are very few quotes borrowed from other authors. Not many reference books exist in this particular field (Murphy and Koskela 2010). It remains difficult nowadays to find an operational definition for specialised approaches such as “semantics” or “pragmatics” (Laberge 2013). Undoubtedly, this impressive Oxford Dictionary of Pragmatics by Yan Huang is so far the most complete resource available in English language on pragmatics to be written by a sole author. It is not an introduction book, and potential readers will have to be familiar with the basics of pragmatics in order to fully benefit from its dense contents. I guess even experienced professors in our field will learn a lot from this very instructive dictionary with countless new terms and recent trends. Not suited for public libraries and perhaps too complex for colleges, this sourcebook will be required for university libraries. This unique resource will especially be useful for advanced undergraduates and graduate students in domains related to linguistics, sociolinguistics, philosophy of language, and obviously in pragmatics.

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Research Interests: American Studies, Canadian Studies, Quebec Studies, Cultural Studies,
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