

PRAGMATICS OF EPISTEMIC WARRANTS OF THE REAL, THE POSSIBLE AND THE PROBABLE IN DISCOURSE

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The 'pragmatics of language' is a set of pragmatic means of a particular language, the meanings of which not only shape the world, but are themselves changed in discourse. Linguistic pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines linguistic units from the perspective of their use. The so-called 'pragmatic turn' of the 1970s marked a growing scholarly interest in language as a form of action, within which words acquire their contextual meanings, often non-literal and sometimes radically different from decontextualised dictionary meanings. The study of the contribution of linguistic means of epistemic modality to discourse constitutes the domain of epistemic pragmatics and has substantial applied potential. This article explores the boundaries between linguistic semantics and pragmatics, as well as key research directions in epistemic pragmatics, with particular attention to the use of epistemic modalities in texts. Special emphasis is placed on the strategies and tactics of manipulative influence on audiences involved in the presentation of epistemic warrants, that is, guarantees that shape the epistemic credit history of speakers and may, in certain cases, lead to epistemic default. The article analyses several communicative techniques employed in this process, including appeals to warrantors of truth and reliability (authority), cognitive and communicative manoeuvring, and the use of so-called toggle words in media discourse, among others.

Keywords: *pragmatics vs. semantics, pragmaticism, possible – world semantics, epistemic modality, epistemic warrant, epistemic default, epistemic manoeuvring, toggle word*

1. Pragmatics lost and anticipated

The title of the recently held and highly successful conference, “*In Search of Pragmatics*”, suggests that currently we do not have a linguistic domain called *pragmatics*: either it does not yet exist (pragmatics anticipated), or it has already been lost (pragmatics lost).

However, this is the first interpretation of the problem that springs to mind; it competes with another, more optimistic one: pragmatics does exist, it is here among us, yet under a different name, or perhaps no name at all. Our task, therefore, is to remove its cloak of invisibility and/or to determine which of the familiar domains is sometimes, or habitually, called pragmatics. Or could be called so, but somehow resists the name.



The typical approach in pragmatics is to identify the range of meanings of a linguistic expression by determining how words are normally and/or consistently used in specific contexts, and how they are never used. Based on these data, one can elucidate the actual meaning of words in a particular passage of text. In other words, we are dealing with a hermeneutic procedure aimed at clarifying the meaning of the text. The same procedure can be applied to determining the meaning of the term *pragmatics* itself.

In the search for the 'proper' domain of study and/or the appropriate name for it, scholars proceed along different paths:

– The first one is to search among candidates that already bear this or a similar name, checking their properties to determine whether one of them is indeed the domain sought. This is akin to persistently searching for a book on a bookshelf by its cover, while the book is sitting in plain sight on the table.

– Another approach is to create a new linguistic domain at one's own risk and call it pragmatics, without any fear that the 'proper' pragmatics may one day encounter its namesake.

In attempting to define pragmatics, philosophers of language have explored both paths, and the literature on the problem is extensive. When following the first path, they often remind us that in everyday language, outside linguistics, *pragmaticality* is associated with the philosophical movement of *pragmatism* or *pragmaticism*, founded by Charles S. Peirce. The English term *pragmatics* in the sense 'a branch of science' was coined by Charles W. Morris, a follower of this tradition, with the meaning 'a domain of pragmatic scientific inquiry'. Morris coined the term *pragmatics* with explicit reference to pragmatism (or pragmaticism), the trend of American philosophy originated with Peirce and within which Morris himself worked (Nerlich & Clarke 1996, p. 5). Long before the twentieth century, the word *pragmatic* (and *pragmatical*) appeared in English texts, alongside *pragmatisch* in German and *pragmatique* in French. These usages allude to the Pragmatic Sanction – the law of succession in the Holy Roman Empire that permitted a woman to ascend the throne in the absence of male heirs. Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) once used the word *pragmatics* as a translation equivalent of the German *Pragmatik* when paraphrasing Robert Walpole: "Why bother with the Kaiser and his German puddles? asks Walpole. Once detach Prussia from him, the Kaiser will perhaps sit still, and leave the world and us free of his Pragmatics and his Sanctions and Apanages" (Carlyle 1859, p. 142).

One can discern a line of interpretation that treats pragmatics as a mode of humble necessity in Immanuel Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, where he writes that a systematically constructed doctrine of the knowledge of the human being can be either physiological or pragmatic: "A doctrine of the knowledge of human beings, systematically formulated (anthropology), can exist either in a physiological or in a pragmatic point of view. – Physiological knowledge of the human being concerns the investi-



gation of what *nature* makes of the human being; pragmatic, the investigation of what *be* as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can and should make of himself" (Kant 2007, p. 231).¹ The then-rare German noun *Pragmatik* should be interpreted as having the semantic component of necessity or compulsion, as illustrated, for example, in Karl Marx's use of *Verstandespragmatik* to describe narrow rationality: "During our exposal, we have shown how the fantastic, unctuous, soft-hearted mysticism of the speaker turns into the hard-heartedness of pettifogging mental pragmatism and into the narrowmindedness of an unprincipled empirical calculation"² (Marx 2010, p. 159–160).

Today, pragmatics as a branch of semiotics and linguistics is understood as something that is only etymologically related to the philosophical movement. The 'pragmatic' method consists in comparing the practical consequences of different solutions to the same problem, which is far from being practical ("The pragmatic method is primarily a method of setting metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be indeterminate" (James 1907, p. 45)). It requires tracing what would follow from each solution, and for whom, if one approach rather than another were correct. When no practical difference can be discerned ("it is the same old drumbeat" as a discerning music lover might put it), such disputes are, in the view of 'pragmatists', devoid of substance. Anyone for whom this disagreement is nonetheless regarded as principled must demonstrate this difference in practice ("To try to interpret each notion by tracing its respective practical consequences. What difference would it practically make to anyone if this notion rather than that notion were true? If no practical difference whatever can be traced, then the alternatives mean practically the same thing, and all dispute is idle. Whenever a dispute is serious, we ought to be able to show some practical difference that must follow from one side or the other's being right" (Ibid., pp. 45–46)).

The key idea here (cf. Peirce 1878) is as follows: beliefs are really rules for action; <...> to develop a thought's meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance" (James 1907, pp. 46–47).

The use of language in text production is itself a form of action (cf. *How to Do Things with Words*, the title of the well-known book (Austin 1962)). In this process, words become 'contextualised' and acquire their actual, non-literal meaning, which may at times differ drastically from their decontextua-

¹ "Eine Lehre von der Kenntniß des Menschen, systematisch abgefaßt (Anthropologie), kann es entweder in physiologischer oder in pragmatischer Hinsicht sein. — Die physiologische Menschenkenntniß geht auf die Erforschung dessen, was die Natur aus dem Menschen macht, die pragmatische auf das, was er als freihandelndes Wesen aus sich selber macht, oder machen kann und soll".

² Im Verlauf der Darstellung haben wir gezeigt, wie die phantastische, salbungsvolle, weichherzige Mystik des Redners in die Hartherzigkeit einer kleinlich-pfiffigen Verstandespragmatik und in die Borniertheit eines ideenlosen Erfahrungskalküls umschlägt. [Karl Marx. Debatten über Preßfreiheit und Publikation der Landständischen Verhandlungen. 1842] (Marx 1981, S. 55)).



lised 'dictionary' meaning. A similar shift occurs in the interpretation of utterances based on words (Grice 1975). Pragmatics serves both of these tasks, providing resources for the production of texts and for the inference of their non-literal meanings. To use a language, it is not sufficient to learn its vocabulary and grammar rules; one must also acquire communicative means, that is, the pragmatics of the language, which involves "the relationship between language, situation, and identity, as well as forms, processes, and interpretations of action" ("Im Rahmen der pragmatischen Wende der 70er Jahre, die im Fremdsprachenunterricht die kommunikative Wende mit sich brachte, wurde der Zusammenhang von Sprache, Situation und Identität sowie von Formen, Abläufen und Interpretationen des Handelns thematisiert" (Liedke & Knapp-Potthoff 1997, p. 13). One must also know how to begin an utterance appropriately, how to bring it to a close, how to confirm or refute an interlocutor's opinion, and so on, none of which comes of its own accord. In different cultures, these actions are realised in different ways. A pragmatically and pragmatist-oriented approach of this kind thus runs counter to the lyceum-style mastery of self-contained paradigms of Latin conjugation and declension, pursued without any prospect of saying even a couple of hard-won Latin phrases to Julius Caesar.

Thus, if one follows the pragmatists, any discussion of the **meaning of the term pragmatics** must fundamentally address **its telos**, specifically, the nature of the pragmatic resources available in a particular language.

In tracing the origins of linguistic pragmatics back to the eighteenth century (Nerlich, Clarke 1996, p. 6), scholars explore the roles that words play not as isolated, independent signs, but rather in their interaction with one another in language use ("The main interest in analysing words cannot therefore be one of examining words as isolated independent signs and discovering the relations between them but, rather, has to refer to language use and to address the question: What is the role words play in language use?" (Weigand 1996, p. 151)). Pragmatics is concerned with how words are used not in isolation, but in discourse; cf.: Est' rechi – znachen'e / temno il' nichtozhno, / no im bez volnen'ia / vnimat' nevozmozhno [Lermontov, 1840]³.

During the pragmatic turn of the 1970s and in the years that followed, pragmatics increasingly became the addressee of complaints about 'pure' semantics, a semantics that labels those meanings it cannot or will not explain as 'non-linguistic', relegating them to the 'wastebasket' of linguistics or, at best, assigning them to text theory rather than to the theory of language proper. As a result, the remit of pragmatics came to include the study of both verbal and non-verbal contexts of linguistic expressions, as well as the embedding of linguistic units in the broader situational contexts in the course of and as a result of communication ("Einbettung in die gesamte umgebende Situation, die in der Kommunikation stattfindet" (Hinrichs 1989, p. 4)). This

³ There are words whose meaning / Lies dim or comes to naught / Yet none can hear them / Without being stirred.



reconceptualisation also entailed an ascent from purely linguistic phenomena – language as a system, in Saussurean terms *langue* – to the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic higher levels of language use (*langage, discours*).

This results in a vicious circle: language is defined as the instrument (an abstract entity whose structure linguists reconstruct from its manifestations in texts) by means of which communication is carried out, while communication, in turn, is defined as what occurs as a result of language use. This vicious circle is also characteristic of the ‘functional’ approach to language and communication when combined with the cognitive turn of the 1980s that followed the pragmatic turn. The outcome is a growing prominence of ‘psychologizing’ lines of explanation in accounts of linguistic phenomena (“ein verstärktes Interesse an psychologischen Erklärungsversuchen von sprachlichen Prozessen” (Kaindl 1995, p. 16)), which together constitute the ‘psychological reality’ of human activity.

A crucial refinement of the concept of pragmatics was the inclusion within its scope of the individual and irreducibly unique dimension of interpreting linguistic expressions – what consists in “*appropriation of language at the moment and for the duration of speech*” (Stepanov 1985, p. 224). This follows from relating language to the speaking subject (*homo loquens*). Like a tool that, in the act of use, becomes an extension of a person’s body and spirit, language, when thus appropriated, expands and/or constrains, liberates and/or narrows the communicative possibilities of interlocutors, while adapting itself to the speaker and the addressee. At times, however, it does so with difficulty, lumbering through awkward phrasing that disgraces language as a coherent and well-ordered system.

2. Pragmatics Revisited: Epistemic Pragmatics

If one follows James’s call in the practice of describing language, what, then, does this pragmatic (or pragmatist) slant mean for our discipline? And how does pragmatics differ from other linguistic disciplines, semantics in particular, that also investigate linguistic meaning?

According to a well-known glossary of linguistic terminology (Cruse 2006, p. 136), *core* (or *default*) semantics is concerned with the aspects of the meaning of linguistic expressions that are:

- related to the truth or falsity of utterances,
- observable without taking context into account,
- conventional, i. e. fixed by tacit agreement: the meanings of the component parts of expressions are pre-established and stored in mental lexicon, while the meaning of the expression as a whole (in word-formation and syntactic semantics) is derived in a productive, ‘compositional’ manner based on the construction itself and the meanings of its components. For example, in Russian, the suffix *-ik* contributes a diminutive meaning to the word in which it occurs in; cf. Rus. *domik, stolik*.



Pragmatics, by contrast, constitutes a 'perspective' that leads to non-literal, 'non-compositional', and 'creative' meanings of the whole, i. e. meanings that cannot be derived solely from the meanings of their component parts (cf. Mey 2009, p. 797). Such 'non-compositional' semantic shifts are related not so much to the properties of signs as such, considered 'in vacuum', as to the regularities and contingencies of how people use words and the objects they denote. For example, why does Rus. *ruchka* denote not only a small hand (the meaning that is computed compositionally by combining the root *ruk-* / *ruch-* 'hand' with the diminutive suffix – *ik*), but also an object used for writing? *Sharikovaya nozhka* ('ball-point little leg'), rather than *sharikovaya noga* ('ball-point leg', without the endearing diminutive), might also have been an attractive option. Is it because people write with their hands far more often than with their feet or legs? Such questions are of no concern to linguistic semantics; they fall within the domain of pragmatics, which investigates, among other things:

– the stylistic choice of figures of speech (metaphors, images, and the like), which does not necessarily affect truth-value assessment. Metaphors and artistic images are not 'true' in the same sense as 'reality'; indeed, the notion of 'metaphorical truth', frequently invoked by empirical linguists, is rejected by some philosophers and logicians. Cf.: "There is strictly speaking no metaphoric truth as distinguished from normal truth. The truth-conditions of statements containing a metaphoric expression are the same as normal truth-conditions, given the nonliteral meaning of that expression itself" (Hintikka & Sandu 1994, p. 157).

– the sociopsychological environment of communicative (speech) events, including contextually conditioned preceding and subsequent utterances, participants in interaction, their relationships and knowledge, practical goals, and the like; cf.: "Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the use of language in social contexts and the ways in which people produce and comprehend meanings through language" (Kecskes 2014, p. 6). The influence of 'pragmatism' is evident here;

– non-conventional meanings that diverge from literal semantics and are introduced *ad hoc*, for instance, in wordplay that deliberately breaches established norms, as in expressions where *one spots the trick with one's own hands*;

– the ways in which the meanings of utterances are deployed in human activity by individuals with their irreducibly unique 'personal' characteristics, both in the real, 'physical' world and in the 'metaphorical' world, which, following Leibniz, is referred to as a possible world.

In this terminology, the real world (etymologically, the world of things) is merely one amongst many 'possible' worlds, albeit "the best of all possible worlds" (Voltaire). Such usage, however, diverges from the everyday meaning of the lexical unit *possible*: if, in response to the question "Can you swim?", one answers "Possibly," this usually implies that one cannot, or, awkwardly enough, has never tried. Such a reply is simply more diplomatic



and polite than a blunt, outright “No”. For this very reason, the line “*I love you with a brother’s love, / Perchance one more affectionate*” [Pushkin, *Eugene Onegin*, 1833] flustered Tatyana.

Judging by the extensive body of literature, the prototypical areas of research in pragmatics include politeness, reference and deixis, implicatures, and speech acts, i.e. phenomena that depend on language use and are studied against the background of human communicative intentions (Cruse 2006, p. 136). These pragmatic resources of individual languages also delineate the contours of linguistic pragmatics as a branch of theoretical linguistics.

Researchers in the logic of ‘natural language’ (e.g., Ransom 1986, p. 29), especially in possible-worlds logic, distinguish between the propositional content of a sentence (the event, state of affairs, etc. being described) and the propositional modality of the utterance: whether it is presented as truth given by God, as a private opinion about possibility or probability, as an obvious – though perhaps unproven – generally shared view, etc. Within this framework, epistemic modality (statements grounded in opinions and assumptions) is distinguished from informative modality, which is tied to the actual state of things and lies beyond opinion and doubt.

The pragmatists’ consumerist attitude toward truth (see above) affects the degree of precision with which some ‘learned but pedantic scholar’, like Eugene Onegin with his “perchance”, insists on the accurate statement of facts. The obligation to tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, varies, as does the appropriateness of naïve truthfulness. Thus, it is far from obvious to anyone what difference it makes that the French Revolution occurred in 1789 rather than in 1790. Yet some legitimately pride themselves on their knowledge of seemingly useless ‘precisions’, on the punctilious exactitude of the ‘know-it-all’s’. In discussions of age, what counts as an acceptable margin of error for some is, for others, an outright lie or mere coquetry. The ambitious pursuit of intrinsically valuable knowledge may run counter to the professed principles of pragmatists, but not to their scholarly practice: the subtle distinctions drawn by Charles Peirce, an outstanding heir to scholastic logic, bear clear witness to this.

Prototypically, epistemic modality is “a speaker’s evaluation of the likelihood of a state of affairs, as expressed in language” (Nuyts 2001, p. xv). This involves “the linguistic expression of an evaluation of the chances that a certain hypothetical state of affairs under consideration (or some aspect of it) will occur, is occurring, or has occurred in a possible world” (Ibid.). The speaker conveys such an evaluation by reporting, interpreting, or even caricaturing events, sometimes with deliberate or inadvertent distortions out of ignorance or with malicious intent. Epistemic modality confers plausibility on propositional content, rendering the world in question a possible discursive topic of narration. This assessment of probability is grounded in an epistemic scale, “going from certainty that the state of affairs applies, via a neutral or agnostic stance towards its occurrence, to certainty that it does not apply” (Ibid., pp. 21–22)). Such a scale is discussed in terms of degrees of correspondence between the “modal world” and the “factual” world (Declerck 2011, p. 33).



Following Lyons (1977, p. 809), the term *epistemic warrants* is used to denote warrants of the realism and credibility of references to events and entities in a text. Such *warrants* include:

– epistemic modality, realised through expressions such as *in fact, in reality, possibly, unlikely*, and the like, which strengthen or undermine confidence that the text does portray reality;

– explicit indication of the source and addressee of information ('who said what to whom and how); the mere fact that information is reported in the mass media, or a phone call from 'competent' authorities, may suffice to bring even relatively non-naïve members of the public to their cognitive knees.

The warrant of an opinion's reliability is provided by the 'authority' to whom that opinion is attributed, with varying degrees of justification. It is precisely the interaction of these factors in dialogue that underlies what may be termed *communicative – cognitive maneuvering* (with warrant expressions highlighted in bold):

– Gm!.. Khorosho... – govorit Ochumelov strogo, kashliaia i shevelia broviami. – Khorosho... Ch'ia sobaka? Ia etogo tak ne ostavliu. Ia pokazhu vam, kak sobak raspuskat'! Pora obratit' vniianie na podobnykh gospod, ne zhelaiushchikh podchiniat'sia postanovleniiam! Kak oshtrafuiut ego, merzavtsa, tak on uznaet u menia, chto znachit sobaka i prochii brodiachii skot! Ia emu pokazhu Kuz'kinu mat'!.. Eldyrin, – obrashchaetsia nadziratel' k gorodovomu, – uznai, ch'ia eto sobaka, i sostavliai protokol! A sobaku istrebit' nado. Nemedlia! Ona **naverno**e beshenaia... Ch'ia eto sobaka, sprashivaiu?

– Eto, **kazhis'**, generala Zhigalova! – krichit kto-to iz tolpy.

– Generala Zhigalova? Gm!.. Snimi-ka, Eldyrin, s menia pal'to... Uzhas kak zharko! **Dolzno polagat'**, pered dozhdem... Odnogo tol'ko ia **ne ponimaiu: kak ona mogla** tebia ukusit'? – obrashchaetsia Ochumelov k Khriukinu. – **Neshto** ona dostanet do pal'tsa? Ona malen'kaia, a ty ved' von kakoi zdorovila! Ty, **dolzno byt'**, raskovyriial palets gvozdikom, a potom i prishla v tvou golovu ideia, chtob sorvat'. Ty ved'... **izvestnyi narod! Znai vas**, chertei!⁴

[Chekhov. Chameleon. 1884].

⁴ H'm. Very good," says Otchumyelov sternly, coughing and raising his eyebrows. "Very good. Whose dog is it? I won't let this pass! I'll teach them to let their dogs run all over the place! It's time these gentry were looked after, if they won't obey the regulations! When he's fined, the blackguard, I'll teach him what it means to keep dogs and such stray cattle! I'll give him a lesson! ... Yeldyrin," cries the superintendent, addressing the policeman, "find out whose dog this is and draw up a report! And the dog must be strangled. Without delay! It's sure to be rabid ... Whose dog is it, I ask?"

"I fancy it's General Zhigalov's," says someone in the crowd.

"General Zhigalov's, h'm ... Help me off with my coat, Yeldyrin ... it's frightfully hot! It must be a sign of rain ... There's one thing I can't make out: how could it bite you?" Otchumyelov turns to Hryukin. "Surely it couldn't reach your finger. It's a little dog, and you are a great hulking fellow! You must have scratched your finger with a nail, and then the idea struck you to get damages for it. We all know ... your sort! I know you devils!" ... "No, that's not the General's dog," says the policeman, with profound conviction, "the General hasn't got one like that ... I know it, too. The General has valuable dogs ... and this is goodness knows what! ..."



It is logically consistent that a bad owner should have a bad dog, whereas a respected owner has a respectable one, and that the dog is even 'cured' of rabies as soon as it is merely suspected of belonging to a general. Notably, in Rus. *kazhis'* ('it seems', formally an imperative of *kazhetsja*) is epistemically stronger than *okazyvaetsja* ('it turns out'), while *neshto* marks reasoned doubt as something that defies comprehension. A high, almost maximal degree of certainty is conveyed by Rus. *dolzhno byt'* ('must be'), especially when combined with the boorish self-assurance of *znaju vas* ('I know your kind'). The adverb *naverno* is used archaically here in the sense of 'undoubtedly'.

The degree of reliability of utterances is indicated in the text both explicitly and/or inferred on the basis of the speaker's attributed authority. The highest authority for the speaker is the speaker himself, who appropriates, at the moment of speech, both the language (its *dectics*, in Yu. Stepanov's terms) and the right to judge everything that can be expressed in that language, determining who is right and who is unlikely to be so. What is at play here is the semiotics of authority: the higher the authority, the more trustworthy it is; cf. "*From up here I can see everything, just so you know!*" and "*I'm the top dog now, the rest just take orders.*"

The conventionality, appropriateness, and effectiveness (manipulativeness) of these two classes of linguistic means in a text are regulated by the standards of discourse cultures — Russian, English, French, and others. Several such means may co-occur within a single utterance, paradoxically cancelling each other out or redundantly reinforcing the same effect (Demyankov 2022a).

Thus, in a large English corpus of literary texts, combinations of the modal verbs *can* and *may* with *possibly* / *possible* are very frequent. Subjunctive forms (which are also past-tense forms) predominate, most often *could* without negation (8,698 instances), e.g.: *It was the most impressive scene one could possibly imagine* (literally: "the most impressive scene that one **could** **would be possible to imagine**") [Knight, "*Brother Bosch*": *An Airman's Escape from Germany*, 1919].

In second place is *could possibly* / *possible* with negation (6,692): *Do you ever seem to remember things that you could not possibly remember?* (literally: "Do you ever seem to remember things that you could possibly, i.e., in no way could remember?") [Lawson, *The Rising of the Court*, 1910].

Next (examples omitted here, as they are given in the cited study) follow: *might possibly* (4,130) > *can possibly* (4,111) > *may possibly* (3,385) > *can* with negation + *possibly* (1,391), in the following variants: *can't possibly* (1,275); *cannot possibly* (116) > *might* with negation + *possibly* (34), in the variants *might not possibly* (33); *mightn't possibly* (1) > *may not possibly* (29). With *impossibly* / *impossible*, there are only about 30 instances in total.

In German texts, such patterns also occur, but less frequently (Demyankov 2022b), e.g.: *So ein Frauenzimmer kann unmöglich erkennen, was zum Glücke dient* ("Such a woman cannot, literally, 'can impossibly', understand what brings happiness") [May, *Deutsche Herzen, deutsche Helden*, 1885–1888].



3. Warrantors and warrants

By means of linguistic markers of epistemic modality, speakers provide a warrant – whether firm or tentative – that the given opinion can be relied on. The *warrantor* of an opinion's reliability, however, is the bearer of that opinion, the 'authority' to whom it is attributed, with varying degrees of justification and, at times, disputability. Cf.:

Bobchinsky. "Eh!" – I said to Pyotr Ivanovich...

Dobchinsky. No, Pyotr Ivanovich, it was *I* who said "eh!"

Bobchinsky. First you said it, and then I did. We said "eh!" – Pyotr Ivanovich and I
[Gogol, *The Government Inspector*, 1836].

Yet even authoritative opinions, when voiced personally, warrant verification – as the Russian proverb "Even old and wise women sometimes blunder" emphatically reminds us. At stake is not merely the propositional accuracy of the statement, but also the authenticity of the utterance itself and its authorship.

Without declaring one's own opinion to be truth in the last instance and by modestly presenting only epistemic warrants (e.g., *The Sun, it seems to me, revolves around the Earth*), one proceeds more cautiously than by laying bare naked truth in all its minimally informative simplicity (*The Sun revolves around the Earth*). Cf.: "But the very fact of introducing *must, necessarily, certainly*, etc., into the utterance has the effect of making our commitment to the factuality of the proposition explicitly dependent upon our perhaps limited knowledge. There is no epistemically stronger statement than a categorical assertion" (Lyons 1977, pp. 808–809).

Accordingly, some utterances are warranted more strongly than others, emphasizing reality and inevitability (cf. *possibly*), and what is challenged is not so much propositional content as such, but rather the authorities themselves, who are symbolically dethroned by exposing their tarnished 'credit record'.

Thus, the following media headline points to the source of information as a warrant: "FIFA commented on the possibility of the Russian national team's participation in the next World Cup." This headline can most naturally be interpreted as asserting that participation in the World Cup is possible: *commented on* is easily confused with *commented that*. Yet further in the same text, we read that such participation is only possible, not obligatory: "The President of the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), Gianni Infantino, did not rule out the possibility of the Russian national team's participation in the next Football World Cup" FIFA President was reported as saying by RIA Novosti⁵. The most authoritative warrantor is, in prin-

⁵ Rodin I. FIFA spoke about the possibility of the Russian national team's participation in the next World Cup, *Rambler reports* (21 September 2023, 20:23). URL: <https://sport.rambler.ru/football/51461439-v-fifa-vyskazalis-o-vozmozhnosti-ucha-stiya-sbornoy-rf-v-sleduyuschem-chm/amp/> (accessed on 08.10.2024).



ciple, the individual on whom permission to participate in the event depends. Yet the epistemic force of this warrant is limited by the addressee's right to doubt the fidelity with which the authority's words have been reported.

Sometimes, in the course of the exposition, the warrant of truth is effectively annulled; cf. the headline: "*Olaf Scholz has decided on strikes by the Ukrainian Armed Forces deep into Russia.*"⁶ At first reading, this headline is interpreted as meaning that Scholz has decided that such strikes should be permitted. However, the subsequent text refutes this interpretation: "Germany will not allow the Armed Forces of Ukraine to carry out long-range strikes deep into Russia and will not supply Kyiv with *Taurus* missiles. This was stated by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz after his visit to Ukraine, TASS reports."

What is at work here are 'toggle' words, i.e. nouns such as *decision on/about* (which can mean both a decision *for* and a decision *against*), *position on/about* (likewise *for* or *against*), and verbs such as *to comment on/about* (meaning both *to speak in favour of* and *to speak against*). With such expressions, evaluative judgments formed by different readers may diverge sharply, yielding diametrically opposed interpretations. For example, the headline "*Marine Le Pen commented on sending troops to Ukraine*" is followed by the clarification: "*The president of the National Rally would not allow troops to be sent to Ukraine. The leader of the National Rally's parliamentary faction, Marine Le Pen, stated that in the event of an electoral victory, the president from her right-wing opposition party would block the deployment of French troops to Ukraine*" (italics mine). An inattentive reader is likely to construe *commented on* as *commented in favour of*, triggering momentary alarm. Only attentive reading re-establishes the balance between the communicated message and the audience's expectations.

Toggle words are like mines: the opinion covertly implanted by them does not explode immediately, but only later, once it has already solidified into a conviction. When this conviction is subsequently disavowed, an epistemic default is declared, typically accompanied by the justification: "No one ever said anything of the sort; this is entirely your interpretation." The detection of such textual "bugs" naturally leads to the conclusion that the person who surreptitiously embedded them in the text is unreliable.

Unsubstantiated epistemic warranting can be difficult to erase from memory: 'the spoons have been found, but the suspicion lingers on', and Scholz and Le Pen will be remembered as having made 'decisions in favour', not against.

⁶ Borodkin N. Scholz decided to launch attacks by the Armed Forces of Ukraine deep into Russia, *Rambler reports* (4 December 2024, 15:28). URL: https://news.rambler.ru/world/53855214-sholts-prinyal-reshenie-po-udaram-vsuvglub-rossii/?utm_content=news_%20media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copylink (accessed on 08.10.2024).



From the ways in which the possible and the already existing are discussed in everyday discourse, public speeches, literary works, and so forth, one can infer the *pragmatic* culture of pragmatically oriented text producers – specifically, how opinions of persons with “other identities” are encouraged or discredited within that culture (cf. Scheller-Boltz 2017, p. 13). Of particular practical interest are strategies for extricating oneself from awkward situations in which propositional content, supported by the strongest epistemic warrants, is abruptly refuted by the emergence of even stronger counter-warrants.

The applied value of anatomising the structure and dynamics of epistemic warrants lies in crafting texts with predetermined parameters of impact on addressees, as well as providing interpretants – desirable targets of manipulation – with means of personal “cognitive hygiene.”

4. Conclusion

Linguistic pragmatics is thus the branch of linguistics that examines language units from the perspective of their actual usage, or *usus*. The pragmatics of a language comprises the set of means specific to that language, whose values and functions evolve through current and potential usage.

The degree of epistemic reliability of statements is indicated either explicitly in the text, through markers of epistemic modality, or implicitly, inferred from the reputation of the warrantor. For the speaker, the most “reliable”, trustworthy authority is typically the speaker himself, who, at the moment of speech, appropriates both the language and the right to judge everything that can be expressed in it. Through epistemic warrants, functioning metaphorically as a measuring scale, individuals align their statements with real and possible worlds, as well as with their own assumptions and those of others. In doing so, they delimit their own authority to judge these matters and to establish truth based on the opinions of others. The epistemic modality of an utterance thus marks a particular position on the scale of epistemic reliability, determined by the speaker’s epistemic credit history and the degree of credibility attributed to the expressed opinion.

“Epistemic warrants” constitute an object of both theoretical and empirical pragmatics. The development of artificial intelligence systems capable of producing persuasive explanations by selecting robust warrants and subtly planting “toggle words” even in otherwise innocuous messages may be situated within the domain of applied pragmatics. Such systems are fully capable of selecting, ranking, and verifying warrants.

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ПРАГМАТИКА ЭПИСТЕМИЧЕСКИХ ГАРАНТИЙ РЕАЛЬНОГО, ВОЗМОЖНОГО И ВЕРОЯТНОГО В ДИСКУРСЕ

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Лингвистическая прагматика – раздел языкознания, исследующий языковые единицы под углом зрения их употребления. А прагматика конкретного языка – прагматические средства, не только меняющие мир, но и сами модифицирующиеся по ходу дискурса. «Прагматический поворот» 1970-х годов в лингвистике проявился как резко возросший интерес к употреблению языка как к действию, при котором слова приобретают свой актуальный смысл, часто небуквальный и радикально отличный от внеконтекстного словарного значения. Исследование вклада, который делают языковые средства эпистемической модальности в значение дискурса, представляет предмет эпистемической прагматики и имеет большой прикладной потенциал. В статье рассматриваются линии разграничения лингвистической семантики и прагматики, а также направления исследований в области эпистемической прагматики, включая употребление эпистемических модальностей в тексте. Особую роль играют стратегии и тактики манипулятивного воздействия на аудиторию при подаче эпистемических гарантий, сказывающиеся на эпистемической кредитной истории коммуникантов и иногда приводящие к эпистемическому же дефолту. Анализируются некоторые коммуникативные техники, используемые при этом: апелляция к гаранту истины и достоверности (авторитету), когнитивно-коммуникативное маневрирование (лавирование при сверхгибкой подаче мнения), тумблерные слова в текстах СМИ и др.

Ключевые слова: прагматика vs. семантика, прагматизм, семантика возможных миров, эпистемическая модальность, эпистемическая гарантия, эпистемический дефолт, эпистемическое маневрирование, тумблерное слово



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ПРЕДСТАВЛЕНО ДЛЯ ВОЗМОЖНОЙ ПУБЛИКАЦИИ В ОТКРЫТОМ ДОСТУПЕ В СООТВЕТСТВИИ С УСЛОВИЯМИ ЛИЦЕНЗИИ
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