G. N. LEECH - Principles of Pragmatics, London: Longman, 1983. 250pp.

'O Leão é manso e justo para quem faz tudo direito...'
Income tax notice, Brazil 1984.

One of the problems for both linguistics and for users of language lies in the difference between what is said and what is meant. As users of language we have to learn that

(1) Você não quer me dar uma mãozinha?

is not an odd request for information about someone's negative wishes but, by implicature,   a request for action — and that it has nothing to do with transplant operations.

One of the jobs of linguistics, and one which has been swept under the carpet until fairly recently, is to elucidate how it is that we can produce and understand such utterances as (1). This is why Professor Leech's book is so timely. Pragmatics, for Leech usefully defined .as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations (Preface, x) attempts in a systematic way to find out and set down the principles behind certain choices in language which govern situational meaning. Thus Leech is able to show how and why

(2) Can I post these letters?   Yes, you can.

is a reasonable exchange, while

(3) Shall I post these letters? Yes, you shall.
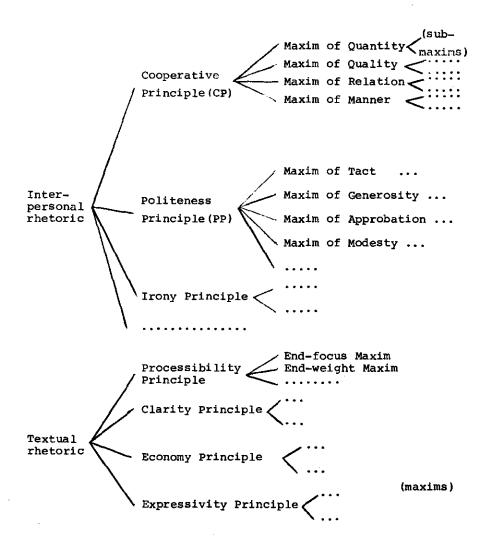
is not (p.26, slightly adapted).

But before he does so, he takes us into the 'semanticist' versus 'pragmaticist' controversy. It is evident that both semantics and pragmatics as contributors to General Linguistics, can claim to have something to say about the meanings of utterances. Semantics has its origins in the study of word meanings, whereas pragmatics in a situational account of the meanings of utterances. Leech has published in both disciplines and, as might be expected, professes a 'complementarist' account: one which values both but does not allow one to dominate the other.

Thus semantics, (for Leech part of 'grammar'), will elucidate the propositional meaning of (1), (2) and (3). This propositional value will correspond to Halliday's ideational function. Being part of grammar, semantics is abstract, formal, categorical. Pragmatics, on the other hand, elucidates non-categorically, in terms of maxims and principles and tendencies, the use of the grammar for communication. It can be seen to take over Halliday's interpersonal and textual functions. It does this from outside grammar, in fact relating grammar to use.

To make this clearer let us consider the 'Leão' example at the top of the previous page. Semantically, the proposition is that the 'Leão' is gentle and fair in certain circumstances: to people who behave themselves. Semantics has nothing at all to say about other circumstances. Pragmatics, though, sees the notice in use as a **warning** or **threat**, perhaps both at once, which carry an **implicature**: that the 'Leão' will not be gentle to those who fill out false or late income tax returns. To understand, neither semantics nor pragmatics suffices. We need grammar (including semantics) and pragmatics.

The first three chapters of **Principles of Pragmatics** are taken up with ground-clearing operations like this. Afterwards the emphasis is on explaining what the principles are and how they operate.

Chapters 4 to 7 concentrate on a number of principles, starting with Grice's Cooperative Principle, showing how the well-known maxims of Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner operate in conjunction with a Principle of Irony. These are related to a Textual Rhetoric involving Principles of Processibility, Clarity, Economy and Expressivity.

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                                                                    (sub-
                                        Maxim of Quantity      maxims)
                                        Maxim of Quality    <.....
                     Cooperative                            .....
                     Principle(CP)       Maxim of Relation <.....
                                         Maxim of Manner   <.....

                                         Maxim of Tact    ...

  Inter-                                 Maxim of Generosity ...
  personal           Politeness
  rhetoric           Principle(PP)       Maxim of Approbation ...

                                         Maxim of Modesty ...

                                         .....

                                         .....
                     Irony Principle <
                                         .....

                     ..............

                                         End-focus Maxim
                     Processibility      End-weight Maxim
                     Principle           ........

                                         ...
                     Clarity Principle <
                                         ...
  Textual
  rhetoric                               ...
                     Economy Principle  <
                                         ...
                                                              (maxims)
                                         ...
                     Expressivity Principle <
                                         ...
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For this reviewer, these principles are the heart of the
book. (3) is shown to be odd, not grammatically, but because
of the Politeness Principle: a polite offer is followed by an
impositive. Leech gives a host of examples to illustrate the
operations of the various Principles, in a way which is both
convincing and clear. In doing so, he goes into a study of
implicature, negation, cost and benefit, means-end analysis.

There is much to be mined here.

Yet I was left with two nagging doubts. **Principles of Pragmatics** does not attempt to provide analyses of examples in languages other than English, though there are some occasional mentions of other languages (Portuguese examples too, p.29). Leech points out that

> no claim has been made that the CP (Cooperative Principle) applies in an identical manner in all societies. Indeed, one of the main purposes of socio-pragmatics, as I envisage it, is to find out how different societies operate maxims in different ways, for example by giving politeness a higher rating than cooperation in certain situations (p.80).

The first doubt came when I tried to apply the Principles to (1) above. At first, the pragmatic analysis is easy: we ask "Você não quer me dar uma mãozinha?" using the Politeness Principle in its Maxim of Tact, taking costs and benefits to Hearer into account, politely making it easier for Hearer to refuse the request by asking about his wishes, rather than imposing on him. And the diminutive "-zinha" reassures Hearer that the cost to him is not too great. But why negatively? Leech discusses negation in several places and most interestingly. He concludes that as a generalization, 'negative sentences are more "marked" than positive ones, and carry implications of denial,' (p.101). He allows for negation as polite hedging or as a mitigating device too. But why is it more polite in Portuguese to make the request negatively, if only slightly more polite, whereas in English the negative form would sound petulant ("Won't you give me a hand? Don't you want to give me a hand?")?

Although one does not expect the Principles and Maxims to apply in an identical manner to all languages, the status of the generalization about negation seems to be cast in doubt by this example. Which brings me to the second doubt: the epistemological status of the Principles and Maxims. If pragmatic principles are not categorical, how can predictions

be based on them, and what counts as falsification? Just before
a lengthy discussion of Popper's theories, Leech states that
pragmatic explanation is weaker than formal (eg semantic)
explanation: 'It is weaker because pragmatic principles
impose weaker constraints on language behaviour than
grammatical rules: they can only be predictive in a
probabilistic sense,' (p.48).

The point, then, is not that Portuguese and English
behave differently in this regard (as in many others, of course);
rather, it is, how does one deal with problems? Leech
distinguishes (pp.25-6) between 'unmotivated conventionality'
and 'motivated conventionality': in the latter case,'two kinds
of statement are required: the first states the rule as a matter
of convention, and the second states that given that this rule
exists, it is a (sic) reasonable, on extralinguistic grounds,
that it does so.' So

(4)   Wcn't you sit down? is more polite than

(5)   Will you sit down? because it pays the Hearer the
compliment of supposing that he would not sit down until asked.
Conversely,

(6)   Won't you answer the phone? is less polite than

(7)   Will you answer the phone? because in (6) Speaker
is covertly suggesting that Hearer is reluctant to answer the
phone. In these examples from English, adapted from pages 108
to 110, the motivated conventionality is clear. He then goes
on to discuss 'Pragmatic paradoxes of politeness', showing
maxims in conflict, and maxims attenuated: politeness cannot be
observed totally, or we would never be able to act in the world.

Perhaps our Portuguese example, (1), is a case in point.
Perhaps the negative is called in for some other reason, in
obedience to a maxim which operates in Portuguese but not in
English. Fair enough. But where does that leave the motivation
of the maxims, and their epistemological status in explaining
language use?

Chapters 8 and 9 of **Principles of Pragmatic** are concerned

with a detailed discussion of performatives and speech-acts in English. Leech here is concerned not so much with drawing up yet another taxonomy of speech acts, which he believes to be a 'pointless' goal (p.225), since illocutionary force is indeterminate, not a matter of grammar but of pragmatics; to treat illocution as part of grammar is to commit "the Illocutionary-Verb Fallacy" (p.175). Instead, after discussing the work of Austin, Searle, Ross, Sadock and others, he argues for the desirability of producing a taxonomy of illocutionary verbs and illocutionary predicates in English, in other words analysing how people **talk** about illocutionary acts. Speech-act activity does not 'lend itself to segmentation into discrete "acts"' (p.225) but is best seen as a multi-dimensional question.

The last chapter contains a statement of limitations of the work. **Principles of Pragmatics** is a general map of the terrain. It cannot give a detailed view of every square inch. In particular, Leech's treatment of the Textual Rhetoric is not fully worked out, as he himself states. There is need for further formalization and testing, analysis of corpus data, cross-cultural studies, and the extension of the discussion to whole texts or discourses, as opposed to individual utterances or small exchanges. These are necessary limitations, in the present state of the art. We are better off with a general map, since detailed predictions (weak or strong) must await consensus on the outlines.

This is an exciting book at the frontiers of contemporary linguistics. The reader in Brazil will find Leech's style clear and sensible, and the outlines of an explanation for many language-use phenomena which would otherwise remain mysterious. The examples, nearly all from English, are very clear, and many of the phenomena, in principle as well as in detail, will be found to apply to language use in Brazilian Portuguese.

Any work which attempts not only to relate language to language use but also to suggest **why** language forms are as they

are is likely to be controversial. **Principles of Pragmatics**
will be found controversial in lots of ways. At the same time
the book opens a door of a treasure-house of explanation — a
treasure-house which promises much for all kinds of language
study.

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