Foreword

This monograph is a proposal of a theoretical model, called “the motivation model of pragmatics” (MMP). The gist of the model is that language use can be adequately and elegantly studied by looking at the motivation behind it. There are two levels in the motivation structure in MMP. At the first level, motivations are categorized into the transactional and the interactional. At the second level, the transactional is divided into clarity and effectiveness and the interactional is divided into the maintaining of the public image of other and the maintaining of the public image of self. The two components of each pair, further, display a gradient relationship on a conflictive vs. assistive cline, i.e., depending on context, they can be in opposition; they can be mutually assistive; and they can be anywhere in between. It is hoped that MMP provides a framework in which connections between things that might otherwise appear unrelated be revealed; reasons for what we find in our empirical studies be sought, and the dynamic context in which communication takes place be coherently accounted for.

The thought of writing this monograph began to percolate about a decade ago. But once it was completed, I realized that the preparation for it had actually (and “secretly”) commenced three decades earlier when I was a graduate student at Lancaster University, UK (1981–1983). That stint exposed me to the teachings of the late Geoffrey Leech (who talked about “principles of politeness”, the title of his influential 1983 monograph), the bubbling ideas of critical discourse analysis (Norm Fairclough was never shy about what he was working on), the writings of the Oxford ordinary language philosophers: John Austin, John Searle, and H. Paul Grice, and the politeness theory by Penelope Brown and Steven Levinson – not in the better-known iteration (1987, CUP), but as part of a volume edited by Esther Goody (Questions and Answers, 1978, also by CUP).

Thus hooked was I to pragmatics. Returning to China, I began to write about pragmatics (Embarrassing to say that many believe I was the person to have brought Grice’s theory of conversational implicature and Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness to linguists in China through my earlier publications in Chinese.) I found myself, in the ensuing years and decades, dabbling into quite a few subareas of pragmatics (as verified via a glance at the References), in addition to areas typically viewed as outside pragmatics (e.g., cognitive linguistics).

Being a Rong of more than one trade has enabled me to appreciate the diversity of pragmatics. If pragmatics was thought of as a waste basket by Charles Morris (He did not exactly say so), its practitioners have found treasure aplenty from it. Given the “charge” of pragmatics – studying language use in context – we have claimed (and should continue to claim) territorial rights on all things language. The argument is on our side: language is always used in context; context
includes everything; so all things language are our sphere of responsibility. Little
wonder that, of the three major divisions in the study of language – semantics,
syntax, and pragmatics – carved out by Morris, pragmatics emerged from virtual
non-existence before the 1960s to have become the biggest brother of the three,
attracting demonstrably more practitioners than its siblings.

When I was doing a particular project, I would feel that I was examining the
fallen leaves in a forest with a magnifying glass. You can't find any two leaves
falling from the same tree to be the same in every way – size, color, thickness,
dryness. Okay, that is complicated. You narrow down your focus, to color. Then
you find that every leaf is unique on that front too – you cannot find two leaves of
exactly the same color! You then get down one more level to study the color of one
leaf and then down again to chroma, putting aside hue and value, as studying all
three still seems too general. What you end up doing (and publish on) would be a
detailed description of the chroma of Leaf A from Tree J in Forest X. You feel sat-
sisfied. Your work has contributed to the understanding of leaves, hence enlarging
the reservoir of the knowledge of forestry (and eventually botany).

A sense of unease gradually crept into me as I chugged along, looking at not
only leaves of trees but also their trunks and roots. The determination of the value
of a particular leaf, the description of the grain patterns in the intercession of a
trunk, and the evidence for the depth of the roots are all worthwhile discoveries.
Is there a need, though, in figuring out the connections between one leaf and
another, between the leaves, trunks, and roots of a particular tree, between the
tree I am studying and its neighbor five feet away, and between the forest I am in
and another one on the other side of the hill – and then the globe? Granted, these
are all different things we are looking at, but does the fact that they all exist on
Planet Earth mean something? Is there a deeper reason for all this beyond the
reason behind the chroma of Leaf A?

I am sure the readers will answer in the affirmative. But the readers might
also agree that, in our “forestry” – pragmatics – looking for deeper connections
and reasons is frowned upon. We have taken a “discursive turn”; we value looking
at the dynamic, moment-to-moment unfolding of social interaction; we empha-
size difference. Theories that aim at abstraction and generalization are viewed
as top-down, as introspective, and – in a word – as naïve (or arrogant). Many of
these theories are accused of ethnocentricity and are dismissed without carefully
examining their usefulness, nor demonstrating their purported weaknesses.

So, I felt, for a decade, that maybe we should not abandon our effort to seek
connections and reasons; maybe there is a need for us to look at the forest while
looking at the trees in it; maybe . . . well . . . maybe I could give it a try? However,
life found a way to keep me from embarking on the project, until 2020 when I,
like everyone else in the world, got stuck inside the house, with little more than a computer for entertainment.

This monograph, therefore, represents my attempt to seek connections among and deeper reasons for a host of things that might otherwise appear disconnected and random. The model that will be advanced in the book is anchored with motivation simply because human actions are motivated actions. The reader will find, therefore, that the book has a greater coverage than an average monograph on similar subjects; that it relies more on the product of the research efforts by colleagues in the field; and that it casts Mr. Donald Trump and the coronavirus pandemic as frequent characters in the examples. The reader, too, will find errors, for which I claim exclusive responsibility.

What I shall say in the monograph is the result of learning from scholars in pragmatics – both those who are cited and those who are not, both those whom I have had the privilege of knowing personally and those I have not. They are all hereby acknowledged for inspiring me. Also heartedly thanked are the anonymous reviewers of the proposal and the manuscript, whose comments helped shape the final product; Rueyling Chuang, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at CSUSB, for her support via the college’s Writers’ Group grant; and Sunny Hyon, who named the theory I had in mind into MMP (“I like the sound of the acronym”, she explained). Itsvan Kecskes, editor of the *Mouton Series in Pragmatics*; Birgit Sievert, de Gruyter’s Editorial Director; and Michaela Göbels, the press’s Content Editor, were one heck of a team. They played their roles exemplarily. Bomi, Sharon, Takford, Lou, Ethan, Evan, Aiden: there is no way to overstate what your love and support mean to this project and to me.

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