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The role of language in interpersonal pragmatics

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Abstract

After attempting – and largely failing – to delimit a distinct field of interpersonal pragmatics, this paper explores what is distinctive about interpersonal pragmatic practice; that is, what makes it different from the scholarly tradition of pragmatics. Three facets of practice are discussed: its aims, its approach to data (what aspects are brought into relatively clear focus) and its analysis of data. The common thread running through what is found is a changed, more modest, place for language, the understanding of which is no longer the assumed goal of scholarship, the size of examples of which for analysis have become larger and the use of which is no longer the single focus of analysis. It is argued that this last development should point the way to a particular procedure for analysing interaction. Accordingly, the paper proceeds to an example analysis of one piece of data.

Keywords: Interpersonal pragmatics; Language; Interaction; Participants

1. Introduction: what is interpersonal pragmatics?

What – if anything – is new about interpersonal pragmatics? Any scholarly discipline or practice can be characterised in terms of two broad features: what it studies and how. In reality, though, these two features are linked because the conceptualisation of a particular object of study inevitably prompts particular kinds of approach and certain constraints. This interdependence is well illustrated by the issues raised in the introduction to this special issue (Haugh, Kádár and Mills, 2013).

Like the introduction, this paper is chiefly concerned with the question of how. However, in view of the abovementioned linkage, a brief consideration of the field itself is advisable. This can be described in its most general sense as that of language use between people. However, this paper below (end of Section 3 onwards) advocates an approach that integrates other modalities, so for 'language use' here I immediately substitute 'communication'. This substitution has the effect of making a large field even larger, and one barely distinguishable from that of pragmatics generally. A smaller field can be carved out by stipulating that interpersonal pragmatics investigates (1) communication between *identified* people (that is, those who can pick each other out, thereby excluding mass media communication) and (2), following Haugh et al. (2013), *actual instances* of such communication (thereby relegating reports of or comments on it to a supporting role). But even this narrower definition does not distinguish the field from conversation analysis or interactional sociolinguistics.

Is a stricter delimitation possible? Two smaller territories spring to mind. One is communication only between people in very small groups. The other territory is a distributed one, not restricted as to numbers of people but restricted to those parts of communication which impact in some way on interpersonal relations. Both these attempts at a clearer definition are referred to by Arundale (2013a), the former as 'micro-social contexts' and the latter as 'relational contexts'. If the micro-social is just a

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matter of participant numbers, it is a conceptually straightforward criterion. It would, of course, be pointless to pick an upper-limit number of interactants out of the air, but crucially its lower limit is two and its prototype would be two people in a closed encounter (i.e. without bystanders in attendance).

The prototype relational context would be one both in which the interactants construe their relationship as a relatively intimate one (e.g. friends or close relatives rather than a working one) and behave accordingly and also in which the focus of attention is personal (i.e. about one or more of the participants and/or their feelings rather than a task or an object of transaction). However, as Haugh et al. (2013) show, it is not at all difficult to find interpersonal communication occurring in contexts a long way from this prototype. Moreover, it is axiomatic among most scholars of interaction that participants of *any* kind of encounter cannot help – through their behaviour – projecting a view of themselves, their fellow participants(s) and – as a result – the relationship pertaining between them. This is the entailment of interaction which Erving Goffman repeatedly emphasised (e.g. Goffman, 1971) and attempted to capture, for instance through the notion of face (Goffman, 1967) or through his study of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959). In addition, it can be been shown (Goffman, 1981: 6–27) that almost all occasions of interaction seem to depend for their constitution and conduct not only on what is necessary for messages to be communicated (the 'system requirements') but also – and more basically so – on various kinds of recognition of the participants as social beings (the 'ritual requirements'). In this sense, *any* context involving identified or identifiable individuals has at least some relational elements. (The apparently unpromising example analysed at the end of this paper demonstrates this fact.)

The centre of the field of interpersonal pragmatics, then, can be pinpointed. As Arundale (2013a) observes, micro-social and relational contexts tends to go together – relations between people are usually more relevant when there are fewer of them involved. But the boundaries of the field are eye-wateringly fuzzy. It is presumably for this reason that Haugh et al. (2013) opt to define interpersonal pragmatics as a 'perspective'; that is, in terms of how the field is approached rather than the field itself.

It is on approach and analysis that the rest of this paper focuses. It does not offer the wide-ranging, comprehensive discussion of issues (quite rightly) found in the introduction. Instead, it considers some aspects of current scholarly practice in the context of their historical roots. Interpersonal pragmatics has arisen from pragmatics, whose origins were in the philosophy of language and as an offshoot of formal linguistics. These origins set the course for the pragmatic scholarship, a course aimed at investigating how context and other aspects of situation can be incorporated into the study of what utterances mean in order to provide a satisfactory account of what *people* mean and understand when those utterances are uttered.

This paper attempts to identify and then exemplify the most significant ways in which the practice of interpersonal pragmatics is deviating from this historical course. Section 2 considers the role of interpersonal pragmatics in the furtherance of human knowledge as a whole. Section 3 discusses scholarly approaches to data. Section 4 discusses the mechanics of examining data. The common thread running through the deviations identified is the treatment of language. And it is found that, in different ways, language suffers a general demotion. Section 5 then offers an extended analysis of some data, intended to exemplify the insights of the previous sections. The concluding section 6 steps back and considers the future.

2. What interpersonal pragmatics is for

The most general, half-hidden but wide-reaching deviation of interpersonal pragmatics from its pragmatics roots concerns the assumed end-point, the wider social 'take-away value', in studying the field. Why do interpersonal pragmatics anyway? Physicists try to understand the nature of the inanimate physical world; biologists try to understand the nature and workings of life. And linguists, of course, try to understand the nature and workings of language. Notwithstanding its influences from semiotics and philosophy, the chiefly linguistic origins of pragmatics have meant that it has traditionally partaken of this endeavour, conceived of and presented as a contribution to the understanding of language.

Even after pragmatics had become established as a field in its own right, this largely presupposed underlying goal remained firmly linguistic. In 1983, two scholarly tomes addressing the subject as a whole were published. In the preamble to his monograph on *Principles of Pragmatics*, Leech (1983) after welcoming a perceived ''shift of direction within linguistics away from 'competence' and towards 'performance'' goes on:

> but the resulting pluralism has meant that no comprehensive paradigm has yet emerged as a successor to generative grammar. A unified account of what language is has, I believe, been lost. Hence the purpose of this book is to argue in favour of a fresh paradigm [which] will concentrate on arguing the validity of a particular view of the distinction between grammar and pragmatics. This argument . . . will have fundamental implications for the way one looks at language . . . We cannot understand the nature of language without studying both these domains, and the interaction between them. (Leech, 1983: 4)

Notice that it is the contemporary lack of a ''comprehensive paradigm'' and loss of ''a unified account'' of language which gives the book its ''purpose''. The argument concerning the relation of grammar and pragmatics is to be seen as a contribution towards these desiderata (''fundamental implications for the way one looks at language'') because without studying this relation ''we cannot understand the nature of language''. The preamble proceeds (Leech, 1983: 4–5) to the presentation of a set of postulates whose effect is to define ''two separate paradigms of research, making up a single 'complex' paradigm for linguistics'' and concludes with the observation that by developing such paradigms ''we are determining the background assumptions on which the search for truth about language will proceed with increased understanding''.

In Leech's work, then, the concern is to situate pragmatics within linguistics and its presupposed underlying value is ''understand[ing] the nature of language'' and ''the search for truth about language''. Published in the same year, Levinson's (1983) textbook on the subject, in its emphasis on the relation between pragmatics and semantics (and especially on how the former can contribute to the latter), has the same assumed ultimate goal – an understanding of the nature of language. (See Section 4 below for further examples of this 'language bias' in general works.)

Scholars of interpersonal pragmatics, often without being explicit about it, have been turning their long-view gaze in another direction. In explanation for the reissue to their seminal work, which relies heavily on a version of the non-linguistic notion of face, Brown and Levinson (1987: 1) observe that the matters they address ''have a perennial importance, for they raise questions about the foundations of human social life and interaction''. Since then, in and around the area which has become known as (im)politeness studies, a shift in focus from the linguistic actions of the speaker towards their affective effect on hearers (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 2003), followed by an attempt to define a field of 'relational work' (Locher and Watts, 2005, 2008), enquiries into the complexity of what relating with others involves (e.g. Arundale, 2006, 2010), explorations of face as distinct from (im)politeness (e.g., Bargiela Chiappini and Haugh, 2009; O'Driscoll, 2011) and a great deal of other work addressing human interaction, has increased the degree of shift in the long-term gaze. Face, politeness and relational work all presume social relations rather than language-use as the proper frame for their study. While the initial definition of interpersonal pragmatics adopted by Locher and Graham (2010: 1–2) does refer ''social actors us[ing] language'', the purpose of investigation is to study how language is used ''to shape and form relationships'', and the definition proceeds to refer to 'interactions' rather than utterances or language-use and makes no mention of meaning.

No contributions to this special issue assume the advancement of the understanding of language as their single ultimate aim. In some, a different aim is made explicit. For Langlotz and Locher (2013), for instance, it is to understand the role of emotions. That is, rather than these cropping up as aspects of linguistic meaning conveyed, a part of an investigation into the interpersonal function of language, they constitute the field of enquiry in their own right, within which what people say is no more than a major type of evidence. True, Langlotz and Locher's suggested model of interpersonal communication does not entirely elide language. It advises ''put[ting] the connection between relational work and its emotional component at the centre stage of a theory of human sociality and linguistic-communicative capacities.'' But note that language is hyphenated with communication and alongside this theory, of equal importance, is a theory of 'sociality'.

Within the practice of interpersonal pragmatics, then, the assumed endpoint, the ultimate goal which motivates the practice, has been shifting away from understanding the nature of language towards the understanding of human relations. This shift has implications for the role played by language in analyses. These are explored below.

3. The focus of analysis in interpersonal pragmatics: from speakers to participants

Politeness studies was first built on a Gricean foundation. That is, the original major contributions to the field (Leech, 1980[1977], 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987[1978]) were attempts to build on Grice's answer to the question of *how* people manage to understand each other when they don't literally spell out what they mean and proceed to the question of *why* they so often don't spell out what they mean.

Two points about this foundation (the 'how' question) and its development (the 'why' question) are worth observing. One is that both questions contain a presupposition of an objective meaning which is somehow already 'out there' (or, perhaps one should say, 'in there'), a meaning which speakers can then choose to emit either transparently through their words (following Grice's conversational maxims) or with varying degrees of refraction (hence implicature). This assumption arguably entails – and certainly implies – a simplistic encode–decode model of communication (see Arundale, 2013a; Grainger, 2013). It also has consequences for analytical perspective. Although Grice's 'how' question involves an enquiry into inferential processes, and therefore into the cognitive activity of the hearer, the target of this activity is the decoding of the meaning intended by the speaker.

The second point is that the movement from the 'how' question to the 'why' question placed the emphasis even more decisively on speaker intentions, the effort being to seek explanation for why the speaker says what s/he says. Hence Leech (1983) offers a set of interpersonal maxims which guide speakers and Brown and Levinson (1987) offer a set of strategies from which the speaker selects what s/he deems to be most useful in the circumstances.

Such enquiries and schemes are always potentially valuable. The evidence which has been found for regularities and norms regarding what people say in particular types of intentional circumstances (i.e. when performing certain speech acts) is evidence which it would be foolish to ignore because, as Grainger (2013) reminds us, they form part of the background against which interactants evaluate what they actually say on real-life occasions. But an unremitting focus on the speaker's behaviour can have – and in too much scholarship has had – a number of unfortunate effects. In the first place, it is unrealistic in its sketching of a strategic, manipulative speaker on the one hand and a passive, innocent hearer on the other (Eelen, 2001: 10). Secondly, it can result in a tendency to abstraction from actual instances of interaction and the use of invented, introspected or elicited rather than naturally occurring utterances and, thirdly, with a consequent presentation of speaker utterances as if they had pre-determined, pan-situational effects. It can even result, as many have noticed (e.g. Mills, 2011), in an assumption of a 1:1 relation between forms, functions (speech acts) and effects. However, the blandishments of discursive pragmaticians regarding the error of this assumption are really unnecessary. Neither Brown and Levinson (1987) nor Leech (1983), nor any serious speech act theorist, has ever claimed such an equation. It is just that if one starts from the speaker's viewpoint of how to do a particular thing X with words (e.g. make an apology), then the next step is inevitably to find some ways of doing X (e.g. in English, I'm so sorry, I would like to apologise, sorry . . .). To provide a list of such exponents is neither to claim that the list is exhaustive (there are always, of course, other ways of doing X) nor to claim that X is the only thing the listed exponents can do.

Nevertheless, the existence of these misapprehensions points to the desirability of the shift of focus which is occurring away from the speaker towards the hearer. This shift necessarily involves a move away from the intention of what is said towards the effect of what is said. In the process, it helps to undermine the unfortunate practices noted in the paragraph above.

For one thing, it encourages the study of naturally occurring data. This is because hearers are harder to idealise than speakers. It is conceptually easy to ask informants what they would say in particular circumstances or to elicit from them what they say in experimental conditions, but trickier to ask them how they would evaluate what someone else says or to elicit such evaluations experimentally.

Secondly, once the hearer is centre stage, s/he gets accorded some agency and can no longer be treated as mere passive receptacle. Thus has the notion of evaluation take on a prominent position in the field. Within im/politeness studies, evaluation is the perception and then forming of a judgement as to the rightness or wrongness, niceness or nastiness of a participant's interactive behaviour and hence a contribution to an assessment of that person and/or their relationship with the evaluator. Haugh (2013) picks up on Eelen's (2001) insistence that evaluation is the core of im/politeness. He strengthens this view by noting that these evaluations can themselves become the object of evaluation and that speech acts themselves contain evaluations The way in which a request is formulated, for example, indicates the speaker's assessment of his/her entitlement to make it. In this second respect, evaluation is just another way of conceptualising the accepted fact that any move in interaction unavoidably expresses a view of self, other, relationship and situation simultaneously. But it is a suggestive term because it connotes subjectively assessed value, that the view projected is not just descriptive but moral, containing within it assessments of the socially right/wrong, good/bad etc.

Evidence of the attention now given in scholarship to the hearer is Haugh's (2013) attempt to find hearer-counterparts for Goffman's (1981: 144–152) deconstruction of the speaker into several roles. In fact, the importance of evaluation can – and should – put limits on the shift of focus from speaker to hearer. This is because evaluation can be performed by *all* participants to an encounter (see Eelen, 2001: 109 and Haugh, 2013), including the speaker. But this realisation encourages a further development. Participants, as opposed to hearers or speakers, belong not to utterances but to interaction. (Hence the drive exemplified by many of the contributions in this issue to examine stretches of interaction longer than the single utterance or adjacency pair.) The significance of this development – the situation swimming into focus – is addressed in the next section.

4. The procedure for analysis in interpersonal pragmatics

In a scene from the American TV sitcom *The Big Bang Theory*, Leonard, one of the occupants of a shared apartment, arrives through the door of the apartment one evening carrying bags of take-away food. He and his flatmate, the academically brilliant but aspergic Sheldon, exchange minimal greetings and then the following occurs:

> Leonard: Hope you're hungry.
> Sheldon: Interesting. A friendly sentiment in this country, cruel taunt in the Sudan. It's a lesson in context.[1]

[1] Script can be found at http://bigbangtrans.wordpress.com/series-4-episode-20-the-herb-garden-germination/.

For the regular audience of this comedy, the fact that Sheldon, instead of responding appropriately to his flatmate's expressed wish, makes a metapragmatic comment on it is characteristic of his alienation from social interaction. In this case, the characterisation is compounded by his added comment about 'a lesson in context', thereby highlighting that, from a practical viewpoint, it is a lesson he has failed to learn!

And there is a further absurdity. His flatmate has arrived through the door, not long before the normal time for their evening meal, carrying bags of food. They both *know* it is time to eat; Leonard's entry with food for both of them has been *expected*; they both *know* this setting is the one in which they habitually eat their evening meal; their relationship is not overtly hostile. In this context, any competent interactant in Sheldon's position could be expected to interpret Leonard's remark as either a generalised benediction (Sheldon's 'friendly sentiment') or, possibly, as an implicature that Leonard believes he has brought home an unnecessarily large amount of food (although as Sheldon is not looking at Leonard at the time, and Leonard's prosody is not marked, this is less likely on this occasion). Sheldon's raising of the possibility of a different interpretation for which there is no conceivable contextual warrant is not a lesson in context at all; rather, it is the wilful ignoring of context.

It is ironic, therefore, that this very example has been cited in blogs by the president of a leadership and workforce productivity consultancy firm, as an ''important leadership lesson''[2] and by the CEO of a communications skills training company, who observes that Sheldon ''notices something that most of us take for granted: *Context*'' (original emphasis).[3] And yet such misguided uptake is not really so far away from habitual analytical practices in scholarly pragmatics in the sense that, as a result of its linguistic and philosophy-of-language origins, this has traditionally started off with the words and then added on aspects of situation to help explain them afterwards. Brief characterisations of pragmatics reflect this history. Thus Simpson (1989: 119–158) formulates the subject as ''semantics + situation''; Jaszcolt (2002: 1) characterises it as ''a study of how hearers add contextual information to the semantic structure''; the summing up of the first chapter of Grundy's textbook begins ''pragmaticians study the way in which language is appropriate to the context in which it is used'' (Grundy, 2000: 19); even Mey, whose overview of the field stresses the social more than any other, describes pragmatics as ''the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society'' (Mey, 2001: 6). In all cases, then, the language comes first, context second.

It is for this historical reason, presumably, that pragmatic scholarly works which include non-linguistic communication (e.g. body language, facial expression or other visual signals) in their analysis usually feel the need to label such analysis 'multi-modal' – as if language produced in a physical vacuum were the default case. Non-linguistic signals, then, constitute another aspect of context sometimes 'added' to the study of the words.

What the TV sitcom example illustrates is that this word-centred starting point, this sequencing is, from the viewpoint of participants in interaction, counter-intuitive. When interpreting utterances, interactants do not first hear the semantic content and then sift through a list of possible contexts to find one, which fits. They are already *in* the context. They start with that and it is the words that are interpreted to fit.

I therefore wish to suggest that if we are serious about aiming at understanding the role of interaction in human social relations as our goal, and especially if we are serious about a participant perspective on interaction, our analyses need to remove words from their traditionally central position. We need, first, to adopt a radically Goffmanian perspective (e.g. Goffman, 1964) which starts with the situation – that is, with the mutually aware co-presence of individuals – as its frame. To this frame within which analysis is to take place, we also need to take account of all relevant aspects of extra-situational context. These broader aspects of context include both the sociocultural and the interpersonal (i.e. any previous dealings which interactants have had with each other). They are crucial simply because they are the perspective from which the participants themselves start. The participants bring along with them these culturally-conditioned general norms and interpersonal habits of interactive behaviour to the situation and it is against these that they will conceptualise what sort of event is taking place (cf. Goffman's 1963 notion of occasion or Levinson's 1992 notion of activity type) and therefore interpret their own and others' behaviour within the spate of interaction to be examined.

Two matters of practice follow from this starting point. First, while it will not be always necessary to examine in detail the whole interactive event, any spate of interaction to be examined must at least be referred to it. In practice, analyses invariably address what Goffman (1963) calls 'focused interaction'; that is, interaction in which participants recognise each other as such and take part in an 'encounter' (typically with words). But the wider situation, involving bystanders in a particular physical setting, is often relevant.

Second, the default unit of data analysis must be a *move*; that is, any action or adopted state which appears to have a bearing on the development of the encounter (Goffman, 1981: 23–29). This may be an utterance or a CA turn but it does not have to be.

[2] http://leaderquest.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/big-bang-theorys-sheldon-cooper-on.html.
[3] http://www.edcspeakertraining.com/resources/blog/entry/hope-you-re-hungry-the-importance-of-context.

> . . . visible human conduct is integral with the use of linguistic forms. There is only one system of embodied communicative behavior, not a system of visible conduct distinct from a system of linguistic behavior.
>
> (Arundale, 2013a)

This procedure is especially important when studying human relating. The identification and evaluation of emotions is crucial to the affective aspects of interaction and, as Langlotz and Locher (2013) wisely insist, emotions are not encodeable (not even through linguistic cues, let alone other types). Rather, they are index-able. A procedure which dealt exclusively with verbal contributions might there miss these crucial aspects.

In this volume, several contributions provide analyses of pieces of interaction according to their visions of an interpersonal approach. However, they do not analyse encounters as such. The sets of data tend to commence in situ, with only partial information on the position of this set in the situation as a whole or when and exactly where the participants came into each other's presence. And yet this information might be crucial to understanding what takes place.

In the next section of this paper, I offer an analysis of a piece of interaction, which attempts to operationalise the perspective outlined above. Its purpose being methodological rather than substantive, the analysis is long and fairly exhaustive, to the extent that the reader may find it bordering on the tedious at times. I crave the reader's indulgence. I have done my best to make the account as lively as possible.

This encounter (like those of Arundale and Grainger 2013) is mundane and involves a canonically occupation-based relationship which is nevertheless of interpersonal relevance, not only because all encounters have some interpersonal element to them (see Section 1 above) but also the participants consider it likely that will encounter each other again. Although it is mundane, it does not take a completely stereotypical course. I also offer it, then, as an example of the frequent messiness of interaction.

5. Example analysis

5.1. The situation

The interaction takes place in Canterbury, England, in a newsagent's in a row of shops just outside the town centre. It is early morning in September. The gathering consists first of a middle-aged female shop worker and a middle-aged man engaged in focused interaction of a social kind. Then another middle-aged man enters and buys a newspaper, while the shop-worker's first co-participant exits the shop. Finally, the second man exits the shop too.

This trajectory – from two people to three people to two people again – is to be expected because the situation is a public one: this being a shop during opening hours, anybody has the right to enter at any time. The encounters which take place there are therefore either actually open (involving bystanders in the shop who are not part of the focused interaction) or potentially so (in that a new participant may enter the situation at any time without first asking permission).

5.2. The extra-situational context

In shops in England (and many other parts of the world), it is conventional to soften the starkness of encounters which, instrumentally, are purely transactional with some nods to interpersonal relations. These commonly take the form of words (as opposed, for example, to conventional physical gestures). The words uttered by the shop worker upon receiving money from the customer in this encounter (see below), where no words at all are strictly necessary for the transaction to be achieved (but more on this below), are an example.

Narrowing down from culturally conditioned practices to geographical location, the setting is a shop in a residential area of a medium-sized town, so that for shop workers to spend time chatting with customers is more expected and acceptable than it would be in a large high street store, partly because the interactants might realistically expect to encounter each other on many future occasions. At the same time, it is not a general store in a village, so that chatting is not the dominant norm either; the urban value of time as a commodity is assumed to take precedence.

This shop is a typical British neighbourhood newsagent's. It purveys mostly everyday items for purchase, none of which require any kind of processing (e.g. packaging) before they can be taken away. Shop workers are not expected to have any specialist knowledge of the merchandise or to actively encourage sales; some might assist customers with choosing their purchases if asked, but in fact most customers know exactly what they want before they enter. Like most such shops in Britain, the shop in which this encounter takes place is part of a chain of such shops, so that it can be assumed that the shop worker is an employee, not a proprietor.

Two of the participants – the shop worker and her first co-participant – are personally known to each other, in the sense that they have participated in encounters together before, while the third is a stranger to them, as they are to him.

5.3. Transcription

The transcription below was composed from memory on the same day as the interaction it represents. (I myself was the abovementioned second man.) It adopts a stave format rather than a CA format because it makes timing and simultaneous doings relatively easy to view (see Bousfield, 2008: 8) and, crucially, because many of these doings are non-verbal. The non-verbal doings are described within square brackets (in block language in order to save space). A series of dots (. . .) after a description indicates continuation of a state or activity. Absence of such dots indicates that what is being described is an action which might be interpreted by participants as a move.

Asst below is the female the shop worker, Cs1 and Cs2 are the two male customers. In order to make reading no more difficult than necessary, participants are not given separate lines for non-verbal doings and speech, even though this means that timing is not always represented accurately. For example, in stave 3, Asst actually picks up the coins at the same time as saying "40p" (and not, as represented, just beforehand.) For the same ease-of-reading reason, standard orthography is used.

The full transcription can be found immediately below, but for reader-convenience parts of it are reproduced further below.

1	Cs1	[standing in front of counter, chatting with Asst . . . . . .]
	Asst	[standing behind counter, chatting with Cs1 . . . . . .]
	Cs2	[enters shop] [picks newspaper from shelves] [walks towards counter]
2	Cs1	[chatting with Asst. . . . . .] [turns from counter, walks away]
	Asst	[chatting with Cs1 . . . . . .]
	Cs2	[stands near Cs1, looking at him, with newspaper. . . . . .] [moves up to counter]
3	Cs1	[exits shop]
	Asst	[picks up coins] 40p [puts coins in till]Thank you
	Cs2	[puts newspaper &40p on counter]
4	Asst	[looking into middle distance . . . [rubs hands vigorously] Yes,
	Cs2	[standing at counter . . . . . .]Cold today, isn't it?
5	Asst	it's that door. People open it and then it gets stuck.
	Cs2	'd you like me to close it on the way out?
6	Asst	Oh, if you wouldn't mind. Thanks. It gets stuck, you see.
	Cs2	[picks up newspaper from counter] Sure [turns away][walks towards door] Yeah

5.4. The action

What happens at the start of this encounter demonstrates the necessity of taking moves (rather than turns) as units of analysis. Cs2's approach to the counter at the end of stave 1 and his continued stance there (stave 2) signals a wish to change his interactive status from bystander to ratified participant. He makes no attempt at a verbal contribution, but just stands there holding the newspaper, allowing the two existing ratified participants to infer that (this being a shop where papers are sold) his intention might simply be to engage Asst in a transaction. However, his stance at some slight distance from the others (stave 2) indicates that he is not going to butt in, leaving open the possibility that he wishes, instead or also, to join the conversation. By turning away (end stave 2), Cs1 closes this latter possibility, creating an expectation that Asst and Cs2 will now conduct the transaction.

At this point (start of stave 3), Cs1 having uttered no word of farewell to Asst, it is not clear whether Cs1 intends to exit the situation or just to withdraw temporarily while the transaction takes place. This uncertainty provides one possible reason why Cs2 also says nothing as he initiates the transaction by placing the newspaper and money on the counter. A brief word of greeting ("Hi there", "Morning") or self-explanation ("Just this, please") might be normatively expected here. Its absence may be interpreted by Asst as signalling a 'polite' wish not to intrude on their conversation and/or as symbolically indicating that he is in a hurry (symbolically only because the words he might have uttered would not in themselves have taken up extra time). However, the possibility of this latter interpretation is reduced by the fact that Cs2 has not instantaneously made his move up to the counter when Cs1 turns away (see middle stave 2). Other evaluations for Cs2's silence on the part of Asst are possible, for example that this person is just not the voluble type and/or not the sociable type, or even that he is performing a silent rebuke by withholding the normal pleasantries because he has been kept waiting. (And perhaps that stance in close proximity to Cs1 was itself part of this 'polite' but rather self-righteous rebuke?) For his part, because Asst has herself also uttered no word of greeting to Cs2 on his approach to the counter

(end stave 2/start stave 3), he probably interprets the relation that she intends between them as a purely transactional one (perhaps so that the conversation with Cs1 can be quickly resumed).

Asst's reaction to Cs2's wordless initiation of the transaction (end of stave 3) is barely politic. It acknowledges in words that the transaction is proceeding successfully – ''40p'' plus picking up the coins – and that it can move straight to a close (''thank you''). Although from a strictly instrumental viewpoint, speech is not necessary, its total absence would fall below the politic norm and thus signal a negative attitude to Cs2. As it is, her behaviour is acceptably 'businesslike', giving Cs2 little extra clue as to her relational attitude, though possibly interpretable as indicating some disgruntlement at having her socialising interrupted (especially if Cs2 suspects that she has interpreted his actions so far as a rebuke – see paragraph above).

Between them, then, Asst and Cs2 (with some help from Cs1) have so far constructed a relationship for the interaction which severely limits their interpersonal connection. It can be seen from the above paragraphs that, although their behaviour is not especially marked and probably lies within the bandwidth of the politic for both of them, there *have been* choices and thus evaluations may well have been made and there may well have been some affective import for them. It is by reason of such phenomena that scholars (e.g. Arundale, 2006, 2013b) are entitled to speak of relations and face being constructed in interaction and that O'Driscoll (2007a) would describe what has occurred as negative facework.

Note also that this mutual attention to negative face in stave 3 has acquired greater salience because of preceding context. It occurs against the sequential background of the tenor of interaction between Asst and Cs1 (stave 1), whose evident socialising in a setting whose primary raison d'etre is transactional is foregrounded by the intrusion of Cs2 into their conversational orbit at the start of stave 2 with an apparently transactional purpose. Neither type of interaction in this setting would be especially noticeable by itself. But together in this sequence, each 'sets off' the other – a nice example of Arundale's (2006) dialectic between connection and separation (or, as O'Driscoll, 2007a would have it, positive and negative faces). It is also, of course, a good example of the advisability of examining stretches of interaction which go beyond the single move/utterance or exchange.

3	Cs1	[exits shop]
	Asst	[picks up coins] 40p [puts coins in till]Thank you
	Cs2	[puts newspaper &40p on counter]
4	Asst	[looking into middle distance . . .... [rubs hands vigorously]] Yes,
	Cs2	[standing at counter . . ..] Cold today, isn't it?

When Cs1 exits the situation (end stave 3), the possibility that he and Asst could renew their conversation disappears. Cs2 and Asst are left alone. However, their interaction has come to a potential end. Because they have constructed their relationship as non-personal, all that remains is for Cs2 to pick up his purchase from the counter and walk away. Normatively, this physical move would be accompanied with a closing ''thank you'', especially because Cs2 has so far uttered nothing (and total lack of verbal contribution to this kind of encounter would be assessed as impolite in this culture). Asst certainly seems to think they are 'done' at this point as she does not engage with Cs1 in any way (start stave 4).

However, Cs2 does not make the final move expected of him. The newspaper remains on the counter and he just stands there. (Why? See below) As a result, when Asst starts rubbing her hands in the conventional sign to indicate feeling cold (mid stave 4), and despite the fact that she still does not engage Cs2 in eye contact, her act becomes a potentially communicative one, a potential which Cs2 makes use of (end stave 4).

Two observations at this point: First we see the value of taking into account the whole situation when seeking to understand moves within it. Asst's hand-rub is the cue for a new sequence of interaction but this new sequence is only possible because the previous sequence has not been satisfactorily completed. (Note, in fact, that it is *never* satisfactorily completed – Cs2 leaves the shop without giving the conventional thanks.) Grainger's (2103) analysis of interaction allows a similar observation – that a single-utterance or adjacency pair approach cannot account for the facework involved in topic avoidance/changing the subject because such an account demands attention to prior turns.

The second observation is that what can be taken as constituting a move in interaction cannot always be predicted. Asst's hand-rub is not conventionally communicative. At the time when it is performed, its status as a move is ambiguous. This is partly because it not clear at this point to the two participants whether or not they are still engaged in focused interaction. (Cs2's continued presence at the counter might suggest to Asst that he thinks they are, or that he wishes that they are – but on the other hand maybe he is just a bit slow; Asst's gaze might suggest to Cs2 that she thinks they aren't, or that she wishes they weren't – but on the other hand maybe her hand-rubbing gesture is a sign that she recognises that they are). It is also because, regardless of the type of interaction the participants are engaged in, it is not clear whether the gesture is to be taken as on the 'attend track' – giving information – or on the 'disattend track', giving off information (Goffman, 1963). It is only when Cs2 picks up on the gesture by making a remark that indexes it that it becomes analysable as a move, a status which has been constructed by the interactants themselves.

4	Asst	[looking into middle distance ….. [rubs hands vigorously]]	Yes,
	Cs2	[standing at counter ……] Cold today, isn't it?	
5	Asst	it's that door. People open it and then it gets stuck.	
	Cs2		'd you like me to close it on the way out?
6	Asst	Oh, if you wouldn't mind. Thanks.	It gets stuck, you see.
	Cs2	[picks up newspaper from counter] Sure [turns away] [walks towards door] Yeah	

So (to continue) the analyst is now faced with the apparently odd case of a quintissential conversational opener (''Cold today, isn't it?'') functioning as a response. One might cry foul here and point out that a different analysis is possible: that the hand-rub was indeed mere giving off, a reflex physical gesture by someone who saw themselves as not engaged in focused interaction at that point, and that it merely happened to give Cs2 an excuse to make what is indeed no more than a standard conversational opener for a (new) spate of focused interaction. However, there are two reasons why this analysis does not work. First, this particular remark occurs at an incongruous point of time. As an opener for this particular encounter, one would expect it to occur right at the beginning, when the customer has just entered, having been experiencing the cold. Second, note that Asst's response to the remark (start stave 5) indexes not only the remark itself (''Yes'') but also her own gesture (''it's that door . . .''). It offers an account for this gesture, which is that she herself feels cold, not the weather in general. Thus, she interprets Cs2's remark as also indexing the gesture – and between them they have made the gesture an integral move in the interaction.

Asst's comment in stave 5, in that it is a complaint, does, however, offer the possibility of some conversational exchanges to follow. (Indeed, because it thematises the immediate, local condition of the participants, it is more promising in this respect than if she had interpreted Cs2's ''Cold today, isn't it?'' as a general, conventionalised remark.) This possibility is the greater because of the wider social context: Asst being a non-specialist employee, the prospect of the two of them having a good moan about their plight is more congruent than if the she were the proprietor (when one might expect her instead to express an intention to alleviate the conditions).

But in his next verbal move (end stave 5), Cs2 appears not to take up this opportunity. Instead, as witnessed not only by the propositional content (''close it'') but also perhaps by the form of the offer (''d you like''), he interprets her complaint as being the presentation of a problem to be solved. Moreover, he excludes the possibility of chat by indicating that he is about to leave (''on my way out'', followed at start of stave 6 by picking up his purchase from the counter). There is potential for this ignoring of the implied invitation to chat to be experienced by Asst as personal rejection (a slight to her positive face) but this potential is mitigated by the fact that Cs2's utterance is a considerate offer (to shut the door).

Asst's response (stave 6) begins with ''Oh'', which conveys an element of surprise, or at least unexpectedness, at Cs2's offer, registering that, as far as she is concerned, ''a marked shift of attention'' (Heritage, 1998: 294–295) has occurred. As a result, it implies an evaluation of that offer as incongruous with her projection of the situation in her previous remark. This evaluation may index the changed trajectory of interaction effectively projected by Cs2's offer (away from a conversational exchange or two towards imminent termination of the encounter) and/or its propositional content (that something can be done about the unsatisfactory conditions) and/or the offer of personal help itself. With regard to this last possibility, the ''Oh'' might function as an implied disclaimer that her gesture was an attempt to elicit the offer.[4] The utterance proceeds to recognition of this personal help and grateful acceptance of it.

Asst's repetition of the origin of the unsatisfactory conditions as Cs2 leaves (end stave 6) is interpretable as an indication that she had indeed expected that some chat would follow her original complaint or as emphasising why it is desirable for Cs2 to make good his offer. Cs2's minimal response to this remark – a bland ''Yeah'' without stopping or turning round on his way to the exit – shows that his interpretation is the latter.

5.5. *Intentions and personal histories*

It will be noticed that the analysis above has largely eschewed reference to intentions. The only intentions and 'wishes' I have entertained are those concerned with participation status. This is because *my* intention has been to demonstrate how the participants in this encounter construct their understandings about what is happening, relationally and otherwise, as they go along.

However, any attempt at why the encounter took the course it did, why it turned out that way rather than some other way, cannot help considering the intentions of the individuals involved. No matter that intentions are intrinsically unobservable (Arundale, 2006), that we often have little indirect evidence of them from the contributions made in the encounter itself, or that interactants themselves are frequently only hazily aware of what their intentions from moment to

[4] I am grateful to Michael Haugh for drawing my attention to this possibility.

moment actually are - speculating about and inferring other's intentions, as well as operating in the partial awareness of their own intentions, is something interactants habitually do and something which informs their own moves and their interpretings of other's moves. (See Culpeper et al., 2003: 1552 for a similar argument). In addition, the content of this speculating and inferring is frequently relational, so we need to make use of them whenever we can.

A further aspect of relevance in an attempt to account for what was said and done in an encounter is the personal circumstances of participants. There are limitless possibilities for various kinds of personal agendas and 'cognitive statuses' which, as Kecskes (2010) argues, a fully adequate account of a piece of interaction should consider. Once again, there is rarely evidence within an encounter for these, but again this lack does not mean we can ignore them in principle – only that we often have to admit a full account is not possible.

In the case of this encounter, we have some insider knowledge to draw upon because Cs2 was me. At the time of this encounter, I had only recently taken up residence in England. (Although brought up in England, I had spent 28 of the previous 29 years living outside it.) This fact can explain my rather odd behaviour at the start of stave 4, where I fail to make the expected move of picking up the newspaper from the counter and departing with a brief word of thanks. The instrumental part of the explanation is that, not being familiar with contemporary English newsagents' transactional systems, and this being my very first time in this particular newsagent's, I was not sure whether the shop worker was supposed to scan the barcode of the newspaper before I left with it.

The affective part of the explanation is that I wished for a little overtly social, non-transactional interaction (some phatic communion, if you will) before departing the scene (in general because I am attitudinally inclined to leaven the transactional with the interpersonal and especially because my new home was just round the corner from this newsagent's, so that I could expect to have dealings with this individual shop worker on future occasions). From the viewpoint of this intention, the encounter had not gone well for me so far. My stance near the counter and gaze at the conversing Cs1 (stave 2) had not resulted in my inclusion in the chat. When Cs1 moved away, then, I must have thought that a cheery greeting (''Morning'') in the light of this conversation between two apparent friends would appear unduly pushy, an unwarranted claim to familiarity, or (worse) might have been interpreted as a sarcastic rebuke for being kept waiting. Thus was the course set for interaction of an exclusively business-like tenor. So I was very glad of the opportunity provided by the shop worker's hand-rubbing gesture to shift our footings to an interpersonal level.

And what of the shop worker's intentions at this point? Her gesture was performed without eye-contact. On the other there was no attempt to perform it privately and I was quite manifestly, indeed markedly, in close proximity. It might possibly be analysed, then, as an off-record invitation to me to make a verbal contribution. Perhaps she was hoping to elicit sympathy. It is even possible that she had the instrumental intention alluded to in the subsection above and was hoping it would lead to the outcome that it did indeed lead to –me closing the door for her (what Goffman, 1971: 173 calls a 'set-up'). After all, it would have been inappropriate to ask a customer not personally known to her to do this out of the blue, and for the same reason (a stranger alone with her in the shop) she could not leave the till unguarded and walk all the way to the door to close it herself. But if she could get the customer to offer. . ...

It is here, of course, that we see the limitations of exploring interaction through participant intentions. We cannot know if such a set-up was actually her intention, not just because we are not her but also because she may not have known herself. Our motives for action in interaction, or any gathering, are often opaque to us. For example, when the shop worker made her complaint, why didn't I, supposedly desirous of a bit of social chit–chat, accept the opportunity thereby offered? It seems that by then the chance to present myself as a considerate person (the offer to close the door) was more important to me. And here I have to confess something: having been kept waiting (an affront to my negative face), not included in the friends' conversation and then dealt with in an exclusively business-like manner (both an affront to my positive face), I suspect I felt a certain satisfaction in being able to turn the tables. With her having accepted my kind offer, she became indebted to me (a threat to her negative face), and with me declining to engage in chit–chat, even when she re-presented the chance to do so (by the repetition of the complaint in stave 6), it was she whose positive face was left with some egg on it.

But do not condemn me. The above is little more than conjecture. As I said, I only *suspect* myself of these intentions at this point. Certainly, I was only dimly aware of this possibility at the time. It is only now, in retrospection while writing this paper, that I have entertained them fully. The point of these cogitations is a plea for inclusiveness in analysis. It is very unwise to approach the analysis of encounters from the viewpoint of speaker intention. But this can nevertheless serve as supplement to explanation.

6. Conclusion

This paper has sketched a picture of the practice of interpersonal pragmatics which has a different starting point and a different end point from that traditional within pragmatics. As regards the latter, it has been observed that the ultimate aim of the enterprise is not the understanding of language but rather that of human social relations. As regards the former, it has been advocated that instead of starting with the language and then fanning out from there to the wider context, it is

better to start with the context and then home in on various aspects of it. The analysis above has attempted to demonstrate the desirability of this procedure.

An additional point in this regard can now be made. As exemplified in the analysis above, there are crucial aspects of everyday social interaction which are matters of presence versus absence. O'Driscoll (1996: 29) offers examples of acts which may or may not be performed (and are subject to cross-cultural and cross-situational variability). And Langlotz and Locher (2013) stress the importance for participants in interaction of the presence or absence of emotional signals relative to norms and expectations. As they exemplify, it can be either presence of absence which is the marked case. Yet this dimension is one which an exclusive focus on language finds difficult to deal with. Although it has been possible through access to introspection to examine the interactive significance of silence for the speaker – of words *not* uttered (e.g. Sifianou, 1997, 2002; O'Driscoll, 2007b) – a focus limited to alternatives within language (one set of words as opposed to a different set) is not able to consider the significance of any act – including a verbal one – which is not there but which, from a normative and experiential point of view, might be there *for participants.*

The overall picture painted, then, entails language suffering a rather drastic relegation of status. However, there a number of brakes on this downward movement. Language is not being banished to the sidelines. It retains its central place in analysis but its role is different. Instead of being the ultimate, background object of research, it is one major tool of research into human relating. For a number of reasons, in fact, it is likely to remain *the* major tool. One reason is practical. Words are comparatively easy to work with. They more easily leave traces after the event than other kinds of evidence and there are agreed, straightforward ways of representing them.

A second reason is attitudinal. There seems to be general societal agreement that people can be held accountable for their words in a way which for their body movements (unless these involve physical contact with others) they cannot. There are explicit social and sometimes legal sanctions in place regarding, for example, language that is ''grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character'' (British Communications Act 2003) but sanctions regarding gestures of the same character are much vaguer.

A third reason is technological. Although face-to-face interaction, with all its non-linguistic aspects, remains the fundamental scene of social life – and is arguably the prototype frame through which all other types of communication are filtered by interactants themselves (see e.g. O'Driscoll, 2011: 27) – other kinds of interaction which, in varying degrees, reduce or eliminate non-linguistic signals are playing an increasingly great part in our lives, including our relational lives. All types of written CMC, for example, are effectively disembodied, leaving us with only the words (plus whatever visual symbols are available to substitute for prosody).

Nevertheless, for the purposes of interpersonal pragmatics at least, for the reasons which this paper has attempted to outline, interaction should *in principle* be approached:

- first and foremost as mere co-presence
- *during* which identifiable significant moves may – or may not – take place
- *some* of which may – or may not – be verbal

I offer in this paper, then, in the cause of allowing us to dig deeper into how people *do* relating, a portrait of language as somewhat diminished, unseated from the analytical throne, becoming instead the main power behind it.

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