Book Reviews

Kate Scott, *Pragmatics Online*, London and New York: Routledge, 2022; iv + 178 pp., US$ 44.95 (pbk).

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With the increasing popularity of computer-mediated communication, online discourse has been widely researched in the fields of pragmatics, conversation analysis, and other related fields. While such studies have traditionally been characterized by a text-based focus on conversation, developments in technology have seen the focus of analysis shift from verbal interaction to multimodal text, along with the use of new forms of communication such as tagging and emojis. These new forms of discourse and communication should lead to an extension of the scope of future research in internet pragmatics to incorporate a number of different approaches (Yus, 2019: 2).

Kate Scott’s *Pragmatics Online* acknowledges this trend by exploring new patterns of language use and communicative behaviors in digitally mediated contexts from a relevance-theoretic pragmatic framework. Scott’s work is a well-documented study of the strategies, techniques, and resources users deploy to achieve their communicative goals in online contexts.

The book is composed of eight chapters. In the Introduction (Chapter 1), the author first introduces relevance theory and speech act theory within pragmatics, with the former representing the theoretical foundation on which analysis of the data is based, and the latter a way to understand the new forms of online discourse. The author then introduces a classification of three levels of meanings – basic-level explicature, higher-level explicature, and implicature – and identifies eight key features (such as storage and persistence, replicability, etc.) that differentiate digitally mediated communication from face-to-face communication.

Chapter 2 characterizes online contexts as a foundation for the analysis of these new forms of interaction. Compared with the offline context, the online one has two distinctive features. On the one hand, there is the feature of ‘context collapse’ (p. 23): whereby, for instance, a person’s updated information on Facebook is potentially available to all people, which creates a new and complex discourse context for online users to navigate. On the other hand, online users’ messages are always constructed for an imagined audience, as compared to an offline speaker’s formulation of his/her utterance for a particular addressee(s).
Chapters 3–7 constitute the analytical body of the book, examining the pragmatics of new forms of discourse such as sharing and tagging within a relevance-theoretic pragmatic framework (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). Chapter 3 focuses on the act of sharing third-party content as acts of rebroadcasting which constitute ostensive acts of communication. Furthermore, rebroadcasting is seen as attributive in nature, which can achieve relevance in ways similar to other attributive uses of communication.

The focus of Chapter 4 is on the use of hashtags on social networking sites which create relevance by activating a range of assumptions and guiding the readers’ inferential processes. The information contained in a hashtag may guide the reader to interpret the overall intended meaning, including the proposition expressed, as well as higher-level explicatures and implicatures.

Chapter 5 concerns the pragmatics of non-verbal cues in digitally mediated interaction. Text presentation and punctuation, as well as the use of emoticons, emoji and reaction GIFs online, are among the preferred non-verbal cues the users employ to communicate their meanings. Again drawing on relevance theory, examples such as emoji are analyzed as ostensive visual stimuli that give rise to a range of weak implications and non-propositional effects.

Chapter 6 shifts to the pragmatics of memes. The author suggests that the defining characteristic of internet memes is that they are shared online. As sharing is an ostensive act of communication, memes, therefore, perform communicative functions. In addition to this general account, specific types of memes are examined to uncover how they are linked to the pragmatic process of interpretation.

Chapter 7 interprets clickbait strategies which feature a discrepancy between what is promised and what is delivered. Using a reverse narrative structure, and employing extremes and superlatives, are among the various clickbait strategies used to attract attention which give rise to expectations of relevance among readers, motivating them to click to have their expectations satisfied.

In the concluding chapter, the author summarizes research methods for the pragmatic analysis of online data. She suggests that online research studies involve but are not limited to the following steps: finding a research topic, choosing pragmatic theories for understanding and analyzing online data, and testing the assumptions by using data. Scott also remarks on the need to carefully consider ethical issues when researching online communication. Lastly, the diversity of online research is highlighted, stressing, for example, the need to analyze data from languages other than English, and scrutinize online data from interpersonal and intercultural perspectives.

The most prominent features of this book can be summarized as follows. First, Scott broadens the scope of online research by analyzing new forms of discourse, communication, and interaction. Secondly, she tests the application of relevance theory and relevance-theoretic pragmatic approach in mediated contexts, with perspectives such as the interpersonal pragmatic, the sociopragmatic, and the cross-cultural among the most popular frameworks adopted. Theoretical notions of relevance and cognitive effect enrich our understanding of how intended meaning is communicated in online contexts. Thirdly, Scott’s study draws attention to the need for an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological outlook when investigating online communication, with the author importing insights from pragmatics, psychology, media and communication studies, and related fields (Culpeper and Haugh, 2021: 322).
This book still contains room for improvement: for instance, the author might have added discussion of limitations and future research directions for each research topic, which would benefit future researchers in examining new types of online discourse. Nevertheless, all in all, this book provides a systematic account of relevance-theoretic pragmatic research in new forms of online communication, thus constituting a valuable reference for students and scholars in the areas of internet pragmatics and communication studies.

References
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Sperber D and Wilson D (1995) Relevance: Communication and Cognition, 2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell.
Yus F (2019) An outline of some future research issues for internet pragmatics. Internet Pragmatics 2(1): 1–33.

Tong King Lee and Dingkun Wang (eds), Translation and Social Media Communication in the Age of the Pandemic, New York: Routledge, 2022; ix + 128 pp., US$59.95 (hbk).

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Affected by mobility restrictions brought up by Covid-19 pandemic, global citizens increasingly turn to digital communities for information sharing and emotional interactions. However, previous study on translation and social media communication in the context of public health crisis is limited. The book edited by Tong King Lee and Dingkun Wang, is a timely and empirically rich collection of such writing. Focusing on the relation between translation and social media communication, this book collects work by established and emerging researchers and conducts a series of investigations into how the two aspects of inquiry intersect with each other against the backdrop of the pandemic.

The book has six chapters and an introduction at the beginning. In the first chapter, Susan Bassnett gives an overview of the challenges that the teaching staff met at Glasgow University during the pandemic. To explore how people cope with isolation from mobility restriction, she examines a short work by the French aristocrat Xavier de Maistre published in 1794, who was sentenced to 42 days of house arrest following a dueling incident. Bassnett finds similarities between de Maistre who fought against isolation by systematically exploring his room and the isolated people during the pandemic who try to expand their territory by ‘translating’ themselves via social media (p. 9).

From Chapter 2 to 4, the concept of ‘trust’ is frequently noticed and brought to the foreground. In Chapter 2, José van Dijck and Donya Alinejad investigate how social media dynamics affect public trust in scientific expertise during a health crisis. Based on the notion of communication as translation, the authors compare two scientific communication models. One is an institutional model which assumes linear vectors transmitting