

## The contribution of pragmatics to the study of journalistic prose<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 General

The aim of this presentation is to consider how the field of pragmatics has contributed to the study of journalistic prose. In order to do this I shall first discuss the concept of pragmatics, and secondly make clear what I understand by journalistic prose. I shall then go on to present studies that either make explicit use of a theory of pragmatics, or that refer to the concept explicitly when discussing journalistic prose.

### 2 The concept of pragmatics - some background

The modern use of the term *pragmatics* goes back to the work of the philosophers Carnap, Morris and Peirce in the late 1930s. Morris, generally acknowledged as 'the founding father of pragmatics' (cf. Verschueren 1999: 6), distinguished between three branches of semiotics, namely syntactics, semantics and pragmatics, which he defined as the study of 'the relation of signs to their interpreters' (1938: 6/reprinted 1971: 43).

Pragmatics is a term with wide currency. It has been and is being used in a wide number of contexts, and is defined both in linguistic encyclopedias and in monographs on the subject. According to Malmkjær (1991: 354) '[p]ragmatics may be defined as the study of the rules and principles which govern language in use'. She delimits the field from what she refers to as 'the abstract, idealized rules of, for instance, grammar, and ... the abstract systems of language'. Bright (1992: 3.260) defines contemporary pragmatics in the words of Stalnaker (1972: 383) as 'the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed'. Bright's definition delimits pragmatics from 'the pure semantics of

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logical form' to deal with 'the context-dependent aspects of meaning' (l.c.). Crystal (1992: 3.120) states that pragmatics deals with 'the factors that govern our choice of language in social interaction and the effects of our choice on others'. Finally, Crystal (1997: 301) states that the term has come to be applied to the study of language focusing on language users and their choices and 'the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication'.

The growing use of the concept of *pragmatics* becomes evident when we see the way it is being employed in learner dictionaries, where we can find it together with grammatical terminology to provide information on appropriate usage. Thus *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary* (1995: xxxiv–xxxv) uses the term to give information to learners of English to help them build up what they refer to as 'pragmatic competence'. Pragmatic information serves to create awareness of how English is used to communicate rather than how the language is used in its literal sense as found in conventional dictionaries. Such information is given in the dictionary on a par with general grammatical labels relating to for example word class. The label *pragmatics* thus provides information concerning politeness, use in context, writer's intention or goal, speaker's belief or attitude and the speaker's feelings. The dictionary delimits semantic information from pragmatic information (1995: 1289). While *pragmatics* is defined as being concerned with the 'meanings and effects which come from the use of language in particular situations', *semantics* is said to be dealing 'with the meaning of words or sentences in isolation' (1995: 1508).

Pragmatics as a field of study has grown rapidly in the last two decades. Central monographs in the field are Leech (1983), Levinson (1983), Mey (1993), Yule (1996), Grundy (1995), the work of Verschueren (e.g. 1999), in addition to the multi-volume critical anthology of pragmatics by Kasher (1998).

In spite of this, Crystal (1997: 301–02) states that there is at present 'no coherent pragmatic theory'. In his view, this has led to a number of derivative terms attempting to classify the comprehensive material referred to under the pragmatic umbrella, such as pragmalinguistics, sociopragmatics, general pragmatics, literary pragmatics and applied pragmatics.

Verschueren (1987: 36) regards pragmatics as a *perspective* on language use rather than as a *component* to be delimited from other components like phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. In a work from 1999, he

formulates this view in the following manner (Verschueren 1999: 2): 'pragmatics does not constitute an additional component of a theory of language, but it offers a different *perspective*'. Mey (1993: 45) refers to this view, but concludes that pragmatics may be regarded both as a *component*, as 'the set of whatever pragmatic functions can be assigned to language', and as a *perspective*, i.e. 'the way these functions operate within the single units of the language system and of language use'.

### 3 The concept of pragmatics as used in this presentation

My use of the term pragmatics in this presentation is derived from a number of concepts central to the field. In addition to the concept of *pragmatics* itself, I shall refer to *speech acts*, *implicature*, *presupposition* and *hedging*.

The *speech-act theory* introduced by the British philosopher Austin (Austin 1962) and developed by Searle (e.g. Searle 1969) called attention to the many functions an utterance could have in communication. Thus the term *illocutionary act* (or illocutionary force) refers to speaker purpose, to an act which is performed by means of making an utterance, e.g. apologising or promising. These so-called *performative* verbs make explicit the illocutionary force of a speech act. *Perlocutionary acts* (or perlocutionary force) relate to the effect the utterance has on the listener.

Another important foundation for pragmatics is Grice's (1975) notion of *implicature*. Thus, the notion of *conversational implicature* is widely cited in pragmatic theory. The basic idea is that conversational exchanges function according to *the co-operative principle*, which is set out in a number of so-called maxims. These maxims relate to *quantity* (aim to provide sufficient but not too much information), *quality* (aim to tell the truth), *relevance* (aim to be relevant), and *manner* (aim at clarity, to avoid ambiguity). Interestingly, Leech (1983: 79ff) points out that the co-operative principle and its attendant maxims fail to explain why people are intentionally indirect in stating what they mean, and adds a complementary principle to the four outlined above, namely the *politeness* principle. Other things being equal, the aim is to minimise the expression of impolite beliefs and maximise the expression of polite beliefs.

Grice's conversational implicature is one form of what he calls *non-conventional implicature*. This contrasts with his notion of *conventional implicature*, which draws a distinction between what is actually said – which

can be described in terms of formal *logic* – and what is conventionally implicated and belong to the natural language. On the other hand, in cases where the implicature is clearly different from what is being said, and the listener will need more information to understand what is being implied, the term *non-conventional implicature* is used.

Central in pragmatic research is also the term *presupposition*. According to Levinson (1983: 225) there is as yet no adequate theory of the term. Yule (1996: 25), however, outlines it as 'something the speaker assumes to the case prior to making an utterance. Speakers, not sentences, have presuppositions'. *Presupposition* is used to refer to assumptions that the speaker makes with respect to the common ground shared by the participants in the discourse situation. Yule also states that conventional implicature is 'not unlike lexical presuppositions' (1996: 45).

The final term I shall include in my terminological base for exploring pragmatics is *hedging*. Crystal (1997: 182) refers to *hedge* as belonging to pragmatics and discourse analysis. Hedges are words or expressions that may be used to lower the precision level of what is being said, or to qualify a statement, cases in point being *roughly* and *more or less*.

#### 4 The concept of journalistic prose

One dictionary definition of *journalistic* is 'relating to journalism, or produced by or typical of a journalist' (*Collins Cobuild* 1995: 905). As a point of departure, I shall take *journalistic prose* to mean ordinary, written texts produced by or typical of journalists. I shall further take *journalistic prose* to refer to language as used in newspapers, whether they be dailies or appear once a week, provided the main focus of the publication is to print news stories that have come to light since the previous issue of the publication in question. I shall thus exclude magazines, which do not share this focus. The distinction I have drawn here between newspapers and magazines may in some cases be a tenuous one – thus newspapers published on some public holidays in Norway have been disparagingly referred to as 'magazines' (Norw. 'ukeblad') by competitors, due to their lack of hard news stories, the quintessential newspaper material. Similarly, newspapers, particularly Saturday issues of regular dailies and Sunday papers may include material not written by regular journalists. However, if we disregard serial publication of material like biographies and

novels, ordinary feature material tends to be chosen because it is in some way related to the newspaper scene of the day.

Journalistic prose is manifested in a number of journalistic subgenres. An important source for identifying relevant subcategories of journalistic material is Bell (1991: 13–15). He sets up the following categories as the main ones relevant for a study of journalistic prose:

First of all, *hard news*, the newspaper's staple product. These are the reports of events having taken place since the previous issue of the paper, and may further be subclassified as *spot news* – news items referring to one-off events like accidents – and *running stories*, which form part of the newspaper scene for a longer period of time. Some newspapers also have *newsbriefs*. These are items that appear in a column on the front page and anticipate longer stories inside the paper. Hard news and newsbriefs contrast with *feature articles*, which tend to be longer than the average news story. Unlike hard news, whose primary aim is to inform, feature articles also aim to, in the words of Hennessy (1997: 7), to 'comment, persuade or entertain' or even to 'inspire or stimulate the reader to think, or to provoke to action'. According to Reah (1998: 92), however, the writer of the feature article will link it to a 'topical peg', frequently a news item which the feature writer develops further via comment, opinion or speculation.

Before proceeding to other categories of newspaper prose, I would like to state that the distinction between hard news and features is not always easy to draw. It has been pointed out by Bell (1991) that journalists will in many cases try to present what is essentially a feature or 'soft news' item in 'hard news' terms to sell the paper. Popularised research is often subject to this treatment.

In addition to general news, newspapers have special-topic news. Cases in point are *business news*, *sports news*, and *arts*. These items will normally be written by journalists who specialise in the field in question, and tend to appear in pages explicitly flagged for such articles, or even in separate sections.

Bell (1991: 13) also refers to what he calls *opinion copy*. Under this heading he subsumes *editorials*, *leaders*, *letters to the editor*, *reviews* and regularly contributed *columns*. Opinion copy differs from news material in explicitly formulating the opinion of the writer of the piece of journalism in question. Opinion copy may reflect the newspaper's general political profile or attitude to basic social issues, as in editorials or leading articles. Letters to the editor, reviews and regularly contributed columns are in a different category, but their

content is of course subject to editorial policy and remains the editor's overall responsibility.

A central aspect of newspapers is their *headlines*, which are a major contributing factor to the newspaper's image on the scale from tabloid to quality. Some newspapers, in particular the tabloids, use a great deal of imagination in compiling their front page headline to catch the readers' attention and get them to buy their paper. The British tabloid *The Sun* is famous for its headlines. Anything to do with sex is of course popular, like the one referring to Paddy Ashdown, the former leader of the Social Democratic Party. The Sun chose to break the story of his affair with his secretary in the headline 'It's Paddy Pantsdown'. Even Paddy Ashdown admitted that the headline was 'dreadful – but brilliant'. Other recent examples of the art of headline writing is *The Sun* on the election of Ken Livingstone, generally known as Red Ken, as mayor of London. Anyone familiar with the South Park series will recognise the implication of the headline 'Oh no. They've elected Kenny'.

In my view, all the above types of prose are examples of journalistic prose. The following types, however, I shall not include under this heading. They are *advertisements* and *service information*. Advertisements make up a large part of the newspaper. They contribute an essential part of the newspapers' income, and deal with things like products for sale or job vacancies. Adverts for products will normally be written by professional advertising agencies, while job vacancies tend to be formulated by the prospective employer in question. *Service information* is the professional term used to refer to information in the form of lists rather than continuous text. Cases in point are share prices and sports results. Neither of these types would be covered by a definition of journalistic prose, and are thus outside the scope of my presentation. I shall also restrict my discussion to research involving English-language newspapers.

### 5 The contribution of pragmatics to the study of journalistic prose

In the above I have outlined what I understand *pragmatics* and *journalistic prose*. Before I couple the two concepts, I shall set out a few general points regarding literature and research dealing with journalistic prose.

We may distinguish at least four categories of literature when it comes to journalistic prose, not including the exercise-book type of work aimed at students (e.g. O'Neill 1985). First, there is the handbook type aimed at

professional and aspiring journalists, e.g. Bagnall (1993), Hicks (1993), Hennessy (1997) and style guidelines for specific newspapers, e.g. the *Financial Times Style Guide* (1993). Secondly, we have books aiming to make explicit how language is used to express opinions and ideological content, e.g. Fowler (1991) and Reah (1998). Thirdly, there are explanations of difficult subject-matter, e.g. Vaitilingam (1996). Finally, there is the substantial amount of research into various aspects of the language of journalism, e.g. Crystal & Davy (1969), van Dijk (1988), Bell (1991), Biber (1991) and Jucker (1992).

There are two different approaches to the task of pinning down the contribution of pragmatics to the study of journalistic prose. The first one is to look at the body of research on journalistic prose with a view to how it may be interpreted in the light of the field of pragmatics, irrespective of whether the linguist in question sees his or her contribution in this light. This entails having to reinterpret any hypotheses and research results according to how they would fit into a framework of pragmatics. This approach would be a daunting task indeed considering the substantial amount of research concerning journalistic prose. Nor do I see this as answering the task set out in the title of this presentation: If pragmatics has made a contribution to the study of journalistic prose, this must be reflected in the terminological framework used by the linguist in question.

The other approach is to look at research into journalistic prose with a view to whether researchers refer to their work in terms of pragmatics or not. This approach may be described in the words of Levinson, who states that 'it will hardly suffice to indicate what the practitioners of pragmatics actually do; to find that out, as in any discipline, one must go and take a look' (1983: 5–6). In the next section of my presentation I shall proceed to do just that.

### 6 Journalistic prose in the light of pragmatics

In order to find out what contribution pragmatics has made to the study of journalistic prose, I have looked at works on pragmatics for references to journalism. In addition, I have checked works on journalistic prose to see whether their authors have made use of the terminological framework of pragmatics outlined above.

The results of my investigation are presented under five partially overlapping headings. In addition to the works subsumed under the general heading of

pragmatics itself, I shall discuss my findings under the more specific concepts of *speech acts*, *implicature*, *presupposition* and *hedging*.

6.1 Works where the main reference is to the term pragmatics itself rather than to any of the more specific terms associated with the field

The studies under this heading can be said to either focus on how pragmatics can serve to reveal ideological content, or to have their primary focus on the linguistic aspect. I shall start by presenting five studies where ideology is in focus, and then proceed to four studies where the angle is primarily linguistic.

As mentioned above, Verschueren (e.g. 1985, 1999) regards pragmatics as a perspective on language in use. Of relevance to journalistic prose is his use of this perspective in analysing reports in *The New York Times* concerning the shooting down over Soviet territory of an American spy plane in the year 1960. His analysis reveals that the newspaper's choice of linguistic action verbs and adjectives creates the impression of neutrality on the part of the official American explanation. The Soviet (Khrushchev's) reaction, on the other hand, is formulated in a way that creates an impression of emotionality, hostility and bad manners by means of adjectives like *crude*, *rude*, and *provocative*. As the news story develops, the choice of lexical items also creates an impression of duplicity and lack of objectivity on the part of the Soviets. Finally, as the US admitted that an act of spying had indeed been taking place, the newspaper focused on negative aspects of Khrushchev's style of presentation in order to divert attention from this admission (cf. Verschueren 1999: 233–37).

Using Verschueren's (1991) pragmatic model, Meeuwis (1993) presents a pragmatic analysis of nationalist ideology exemplified by international news reporting on the Yugoslav crisis. He explores a mainly unconscious 'cognitive mold of conceptions and reasoning' which he refers to as a 'world of interpretation' through which people understand, communicate and think about certain phenomena. His corpus for the study is made up of articles from four mainstream quality newspapers, namely *The Guardian*, *NRC Handelsblad* (the Netherlands), *Le Monde* and *The International Herald Tribune*. His aim is to arrive at the mainstream Western world of interpretation concerning interculturality, ethnicity, and nationalism. To achieve this, he asks questions of what world view the author assumes to share with his or her readership and what information is implicitly communicated (1993: 219–21)

The world view which emerges on the basis of Meeuwis's analysis is described in terms of nationalism which aspires to independence vis-à-vis other territories, and largely ignores minorities within these territories. Different cultures are seen as 'colliding', entailing that the solution to problems of ethnic conflicts is secession. Heterogeneity is seen as engendering conflict. Finally, the permission to secede is seen as a democratic characteristic of the political system. Meeuwis points out that this world view is not unproblematic; that heterogeneity does not in itself create conflict and that a country splitting up into smaller units does not necessarily mean that the smaller units are going to be run according to democratic principles.

Yet another conflict is discussed in Kitis & Milapides (1997), who have studied the representation of the conflict between Greece and Macedonia in a 1992 article taken from *Time*. At the pragmatic level, they refer to how linguistic features reflect the attitude of the writer towards his or her reader. They refer to value-judgements being disguised by using *seems* rather than *is*, and by the use of *think* instead of *say* to offer a statement as an opinion rather than as a simple fact. They also point to presupposition contributing to the truth of propositions being taken for granted (1997: 581). The analysis aims to make clear the impact which the journalistic presentation has on the reader.

Of interest is also the work of Bucholtz (2000: 1439), who refers to her work in terms of 'an emerging subfield of pragmatics that I term reflexive discourse analysis'. Her study deals with the ideological implications of choosing written forms to represent nonstandard speech and the impact these choices have on readers, i.e. how they view nonstandard speakers on the basis of how they are represented in writing. The relevance for journalistic prose is that the transcription in question was presented in a major newspaper.

A final point of potential ideological relevance is made by Gruenfeld & Wyer (1992: 38), who have looked at the way denials in the news media of propositions assumed to be false were interpreted. They concluded that when a proposition assumed to be false was denied in the press, the effect was to strengthen the subjects' beliefs in this proposition, a fact they describe as the pragmatic implications of such assertions.

The five studies discussed so far have focused on how pragmatics can serve to reveal ideological content. I shall now proceed to look at four contributions where the focus is more on the linguistic aspect.

In his dissertation Meyer (1992: 92ff) discusses apposition in contemporary written and spoken English in the light of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. While he does not advance an explicit definition of pragmatics, he approaches the topic through the construction he is discussing, viz. apposition. The relevance for journalistic prose is the fact that he advances a number of pragmatically motivated explanations for the construction's high frequency in journalistic prose. Thus, he points out that press reportage has a communicative need for new information to be provided about the first unit of the apposition (1992: 92). Secondly, he points out that journalists, particularly in his reportage category, must appeal to a wide audience and must thus assume little shared knowledge with the audience they are writing for. Thirdly, brevity is also important in press reportage, and appositions are a convenient way of presenting information in a compact way. Fourth, the press has a great need to identify and name individuals, which he sees as the most important communicative goal of appositional expressions.

In my dissertation (Bjørge 2001) I have also outlined the pragmatic function of appositions in journalistic prose. Unlike Meyer (1992), however, I have distinguished between news and feature material, because the two categories have different characteristics. Thus the need for economy is less prominent in the feature than in the news material, which is shown in the higher frequency of nominal appositions in the news than in the feature category. I have also looked at a much-discussed phenomenon, namely determiner deletion with appositions centred on proper nouns with personal reference, and have argued that the principle of economy or brevity can be invoked to explain this use in front page newsbriefs in the *Financial Times*. Pragmatic considerations can thus be said to override the newspaper's general stylistic preference for including the determiner. Thus, the newsbrief may not include the determiner, while the longer article inside the paper will have it. E.g. *Fed chairman Alan Greenspan* in the newsbrief vs *Alan Greenspan, the chairman of the Federal Reserve System* inside the paper.

### 6.2 Research related to speech act terminology

van Dijk (1988: 26) refers to speech acts as a pragmatic device to analyse news discourse. He states that news discourse 'nearly exclusively consists of assertions' and that a pragmatic description will thus not 'yield much more than the conditions necessary for the appropriate accomplishment of assertions'. He makes similar claims in a later work, stating that news reports usually have the pragmatic function of assertion because they state what is supposed to be

unknown to the readers, while editorials may have the additional function of an accusation or a recommendation. He sees the news story as 'one overall, macro-speech act of assertion' (1991: 46).

This view is not discussed explicitly by Bell (1991), but he concludes that performatives are important in news stories. Thus, when discussing the headline 'Blacks condemn moves to quash political violence' (1991: 186), he points out that a performative speech act is in fact a prerequisite for the headline, i.e. a motion cannot be condemned before it has been passed (1991: 188). Later, he states that certain verbs like *announce*, *declare*, *refuse*, *threaten*, *insist* and *denounce* may be called 'news performatives' (1991: 206) because they perform the act which they describe in addition to being typical of news as talk. When pronounced by a person in authority, these express a news action, e.g. *a country's declaration of independence* or another country's *refusal to recognize it*. He goes on to state that when somebody in authority says *I announce* or *I denounce* this is in itself newsworthy, concluding that the 'fusion of word and act is ideal for news reporting' (1991: 207).

Bell also refers to a number of studies (Glasgow University Media Group 1980: 184, Leitner 1983, Geis 1987, Short 1988) which conclude that the choice of *say* vs *claim* has been shown to distinguish between sources regarded as credible, who *say* things, or less credible sources, who are said to *claim*.

### 6.3 Research making use of implicature in terms of Grice's maxims

Bell (1991: 183) points out that when it comes to lead paragraphs, i.e. the introduction to the news items, there is a conflict between the demands of Grice's maxims. Thus the lead has high information content at the same time as it should be as brief as possible and easy to grasp for the reader. There is thus a conflict between the maxims of quantity and manner or clarity. He refers to van Dijk, who arrives at the same conclusion (1988: 77). The need for brevity in journalistic prose is also referred to by Meyer (1992), but without reference to Grice's maxims. van Dijk also refers to implicature, but as he seems to integrate this with presupposition, it will be included under the next section.

### 6.4 References to presupposition

van Dijk (1988) discusses *presupposition* in news stories, but does not discuss it as a pragmatic concept. Basically, he points out that novelty is 'the tip of an iceberg of presuppositions' (1988: 121), i.e. that understanding of news requires previously acquired information. He discusses *entailment*, *presupposition* and

*implicitness* as tools in discourse analysis. Using Grice's (1975) concept of *implicatures*, van Dijk states that 'weak implications' may be used to suggest information not explicitly expressed in news discourse. He shows how these terms are used in a concrete analysis of the following statement:

The Rev Jesse Jackson, living up to his reputation for shooting his mouth off, has lashed out at Jews, white women, the press and his Democratic presidential rival Mr Walter Mondale .... (1988: 69).

van Dijk points out that the sentence presupposes that Jackson often shoots off his mouth (i.e. the reference to *reputation*).

A similar use of the term is found in a later work by van Dijk (1991: 181–83), in which he analyses the press coverage of the 1985 Handsworth riots in London. He shows how the conservative British press makes presuppositions of negative properties of black youths and anti-racists, thus perpetuating racial prejudice. Linguistic devices include the use of verbs such as *allege* and *claim* to weaken the credibility of quoted speakers. A positive image of the police is communicated by expressions like "the police have stopped the 'softly softly' approach to policing"; implying that the police had such an approach to start with. Presuppositions about the readers are evident in references to 'the ordinary British taste for decency and tolerance', presupposing that the British public in general is characterised by its tolerance and decency.

Fairclough (1989: 152ff) refers to presuppositions made by journalists when presenting a news story, and that such presuppositions can have ideological functions. Thus, when expressions like *the Soviet threat* is frequently repeated in news reports this helps to neutralise the highly contentious presupposition that the country in question does in fact pose a threat. He states that presuppositions in such cases are based on assumptions of a common 'background knowledge'.

In a later work, Fairclough (1995) uses *presupposition* about ideologically motivated presences or absences in texts, e.g. the fact that some texts about the air attacks on Iraq by the US and its allies included the topic of civilian casualties while other excluded it. As far as I can see, this use of presupposition is not the same as that used in pragmatics contexts. Indeed, when Fairclough refers to a statement concerning John Major's presentation of workfare without mentioning the controversial term, he refers to it as a device leaving 'room for manoeuvre and the capacity to hedge over whether Workfare was really what

Major had in mind' (1995: 106). In a pragmatics context, this had perhaps better been subsumed under *hedging*.

Both the studies of van Dijk and Fairclough aim at revealing how presuppositions contribute to a less than neutral perception of events. That of Jacobs (1989), however, does not have this angle in her discussion of definite constructions in editorials. She refers to the writer's choice of the definite form as being dictated by 'pragmatic concern'. The article concludes that writers of editorials 'presuppose familiarity that comes from sources outside the text' (1989: 539) when using the definite form of noun phrases.

### 6.5 The concept of hedging

Zuck & Zuck (1986) define hedging as 'the process whereby the author reduces the strength of what he is writing'. They also include references to unnamed sources under this heading. Reasons for hedging in journalistic prose is due to the journalist being unable or unwilling to reveal his or her source of information, or wanting to weaken the strength of a claim which may turn out to be false. Awareness of hedging devices makes the reader aware of how strongly the journalist believes in the story. Instead of naming a source journalists may thus refer to their source in terms of position, e.g. a government official, by predisposition, e.g. a political opponent, or access to information, e.g. an official close to the investigation. In addition to source, hedging devices may be used by journalists to reduce the strength of what is being set down in writing. Zuck & Zuck (1986: 174–76) identify a number of linguistic devices used for this purpose, viz. auxiliaries and semi-auxiliaries, verbs, the passive voice, adverbs and adjectives. They also state that hedges, making a statement longer, violate Grice's maxim of quantity. Textual basis for analysis is the front pages of the *New York Times* of July/August 1985.

## 7 Conclusion

In my opinion, pragmatics is a central concept in a number of studies referring to journalistic prose. Research focus has been on aspects relating to syntax, paragraph structure, vocabulary, stylistic factors, text linguistic issues, information structure, metaphorical language use, and ideological implications of pragmatically motivated language choices.

Pragmatic information is implicit in many more works on journalistic language and linguistics, but as long as it is not formulated in the relevant terminology I find it difficult to claim that pragmatics has made a contribution. For that to be the case, the pragmatic perspective, either referred to by the general term of *pragmatics* itself, or according to the more specific concepts of *speech acts*, *implicature*, *presupposition* or *hedging*, has to be made explicit. This is thus the case for all the studies referred to in my presentation.

In my opinion, the pragmatic perspective – to adopt Verschueren's view – has much to contribute to the analysis of journalistic prose. Thus, the pragmatic perspective can be used to analyse how linguistic choices can create an impression of neutrality or bias, and indicate how credible a statement is. More specifically, *speech acts*, in particular so-called news performatives have been shown to be of interest, and *implicature* has been referred to concerning conflicting demands of brevity and clarity. *Presupposition* has been used to identify information which the journalist presents as taken for granted, and how such information can amount to an overall image of a situation. Finally, *hedging* has been discussed as a device leaving the journalist the option of not identifying the source of a quotation.

Although the contribution of pragmatics to the study of journalistic prose may not amount to a coherent body of research, the perspective provided by pragmatics is a valuable one. Perhaps we may conclude that the most interesting contribution of pragmatics to journalistic prose lies in the future.

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