Brigitte Nerlich & David D. Clarke
Language, Action and Context. The Early History of Pragmatics in Europe and America, 1780-1930.
Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company (Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Volume 80), xii + 497pp.

THE history of pragmatics, according to a recently published book,[1] "is the distinctively American philosophy". Now this opinion can be defended if one extends the adjective 'American' to 'American and British'. To most learners of linguistics pragmatics indeed seems to have its origin in the works of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), John Dewey (1859-1952), John Langshaw Austin (1911-1961) or John R. Searle. And one may even list other American and British thinkers having contributed to the development of pragmatic thought. Now, the main problem in pragmatics is its conceptualization: what do we mean when we speak of pragmatics? Is pragmatics the only notion one has to deal with when one studies its development in scientific history? It seems plausible to assume that pragmatics cannot be the only concept. If one takes for instance Searle's 'theory of speech acts' his theory seems to be just a small part of pragmatics. On the other hand, Peirce's concept of 'pragmatics' was used by other thinkers, like James, which caused Peirce to coin the term 'pragmaticism' to distinguish it from James's way of doing pragmatics.[2] So, what we mean by pragmatic research should be made clear before one could write its history.

But a second point to consider is the geographical restriction of pragmatic thought. Is it true that American philosophy is 'distinctively pragmatic' or can pragmatic thought also be found for instance in German, French or Dutch linguistic work?

A third aspect, finally, is the domain-specific character of pragmatics: Is it only linguistics which is concerned with pragmatics or are there other disciplines where elements of pragmatic thought can be found, for instance in anthropology?[3] So lots of historiographical, conceptual and geographical problems must be solved before one can even think of writing a 'history of pragmatics'. My starting-question is: did Nerlich and Clarke (NC) succeed in solving them?

The authors seem to have found a rather simple but efficient solution to the aforementioned problems in their book *Language, Action, and Context*. They restrict themselves to a terminology which seems to mirror *the* basic notions in pragmatic research. They create a pragmatic ontology in which individual thinkers and their pragmatic/ pragmaticist approaches in Europe and America have their own place.[4] And in this universe of basic notions comparisons between individual thinkers are made so as to find out what pragmatics is really about. In their introduction NC go into several methodological problems concerning the definition of pragmatics, the need of a

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[1]   H.O. Mounce (1997), The Two Pragmatisms. From Peirce to Rorty (London, New York: Routledge), p.1
[2]   Cf. Klaus Oehler (1993), Charles Sanders Peirce. München: Beck, p.35f.
[3]   Cf. Alec McHoul, "Kant's pragmatics". Journal of Pragmatics 25 (1996), 587-592. This article is a reaction to Nerlich's and Clarke's article "Language, action, and context: Linguistic pragmatics in Europe and America"; in: The Journal of Pragmatics 22 (1994), 439-463.
[4]   It has become clear by now that NC have restricted themselves to the Western world.

history of pragmatics,[5] and the relation between pragmatics and speech act theory. The fact that pragmatics by defining it as the study of specific problems (one might call them analogous to the concept philosophemes 'pragmat(h)emes') related to language, its users, context, and action can be found in over 2000 years of 'pragmatic' research is conceded by the authors and therefore - also because of maters of competence which seems to be a general problem of the historiographer educated in a particular 20th-century discipline - they restrict themselves to 'the route leading to modern linguistic pragmatics at the juncture of the 18th and 19th centuries" (p.8). On their way from 1700 up to the 1950s, the eve before the institutionalization of pragmatics as a serious topic in linguistic research, the role of the language user in speech contexts (the social dimension of language) is made the central issue in tracing candidates for a place in the 'history of pragmatic ideas":

> The scope of this book is however not only limited as to the periods and geographical spaces it covers, it is also restricted to a more social view of pragmatics, leaving aside the area of 'formal semantics' and 'formal pragmatics'. (p.8)

The more analytical and philosophical traditions the authors seem to maintain are excluded in their book, although, for instance, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and other phenomenologists like Alexius Meinong (1853-1920) are discussed. And precisely these authors, according to Michael Dummett,[6] should be considered to be the founders of British analytical philosophy next to thinkers like Gotlob Frege (1848-1925). And this road they did not want to follow. I presume that the 'history of pragmatic ideas" made the NC that enthusiastic about what they found in for instance Husserl's or Meinong's work that they did not want to leave it out of their 'history of ideas" - which immediately shows the danger of the history of ideas to end up in an overwhelming number of author's, concepts, traditions, disciplines etc. So if one takes the author's limitation to the less formal tradition of pragmatic ideas this seems to be not quite correct.

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5   The authors refer to the article 'Is there a history of pragmatics" by Anat Bilatzki in the Journal of Pragmatics 25 (1996), 455-470 in which it is maintained that 'pragmatics seems to have no institutionalized history" (p.455). The reason for this, as a matter of course, is its recent introduction into the linguistic curriculum - if one restricts oneself to this domain - and its extra-linguistic ramification in several other disciplines. I think that it is not far beyond the historical reality to make the statement that pragmatics is not a linguistic (sub-)discipline at all but that the status of language in pragmatic research has been overvalued. In fact, pragmatics is a higher level science than linguistics (cf. the place of social psychology in Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857-1913) Cours in relation to his semiology). This thesis, by the way, is not meant to be provocative but to represent the number of non-professional linguists or 'non-linguists' in Nerlich's and Clarke's book.

6   Michael Dummett (1988), Ursprünge der analytischen Philosophie. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp. Dummett criticizes the general opinion that analytical philosophy has its origin in America and Great Britain. This, he states, gives an inadequate, even wrong picture of the historical context of analytical philosophy. Many British and American students completed their study in Europe (Germany, the Habsburg empire including cultural centres like Prague and Vienna) during the 19th and 20th century. The result of the emigration of many scientist to America during World War II is another chapter in the history of the transmission of philosophical, psychological, and linguistic ideas.

In their search for sources of 19th and 20th-century pragmatic thoughts NC take the following essentially pragmatic insights as their point of departure:

1. 'the theory of moods [indicative, interrogative, and imperative] known since Graeco-Roman days" (p.9); this already reveals an important aspect of pragmatic thought: its fixation on *sentences* in which not primarily the referential function of language is expressed but the communicative function - the illocutionary force of language explicitly presupposes insights in the structure of different sentence-types;[7]
2. 'the theory of deixis" (p.10); language is also anchored in reality. This reality (cf. Karl Bühler's (1879-1963) 'I-here-now' as the *origo* of deictic concepts) reveals the situation in which language is actually used and which may serve as a commonplace in language use;
3. 'the field of rhetoric" (p.10); the persuasion of the other to believe one's words was a technique practiced since antiquity and part of the medieval *trivium* which could be learned and used and therefore may be relevant to pragmatics;
4. 'the awareness, [...], of a possible incongruence between linguistic forms and their functions" (p.11); with the development of psychological research in the 19th and 20th centure and the empirical study of human linguistic behaviour this shift from a more formal analysis of language into an empirical, situationally influenced study of human action and language use was realized;
5. 'language is based on convention and therefore abitrary" (p.12); with this opinion, to be found among others in the work of De Saussure, the linguistic sign received its meaning by its use in certain (linguistic and social) contexts;
6. 'a last source of inspiration, especially for speech act theorists, [...is] the philosophy of law or legal actions" (p.12); in social interaction following rules (a central topic in later Witgenstein's 'philosophical investigations') is be presupposed. Without social conventions, codified in claims and obligations, a human society seems impossible. And, of course, language and the consequences of the use of language are important in the codification of claims and obligations.

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[7] The sentence 'it is raining" for instance can be analyzed in several ways and has been analyzed by several authors NC mention. It can be found in the work of Anton Marty (1847-1914), Karl Bühler, and Alan Henderson Gardiner (1879-1963). This sentence can be interpreted as representing a particular state of affairs - with the initial problem of reference, i.e. that there is no subject in this sentence, which may cause problems of interpretation; cf. Karl Schuhmann (1990), 'Contents of Consciousness and States of Affairs: Daubert and Marty"; in: Kevin Mulligan (ed.), Mind, Meaning and Metaphysics. The Philosophy and Theory of Language of Anton Marty. Dordrecht etc.: Kluwer, 197-214. But it can also be interpreted as an intention of a speaker to inform someone else what is going on outside or it can be a request to close the window, to hand over an umbrella, etc. This kind of analysis can be found in pragmatic texts of almost all other protopragmatists in NC's book.

Next to these positive 'influences' on the development of pragmatic thought which can be abstractly reduced to the concepts 'contextualism' and 'functionalism' (cf. p.376) three developments have negatively influenced a more functional study of language:

1. 'the rejection of a reductionist notion of the sentence';
2. 'the notion of language as an organism';
3. 'the notion that language represents thought' (p.11).

These developments have excluded the role of the interlocutors in human linguistic use. The act of speaking was inferior to the purely grammatical, the biological or purely
logical analysis of linguistic structures. In fact, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) was one of the first scientists in Germany who stressed the function of the "act of speaking" (p.11) as the true essence of language without , however, losing sight of the spiritual character which underlies the possibility of speaking.

Now, if one looks closely at the structure of NC's book they do not systematically develop the different theoremes which underlie their search for pragmatists in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. They rather chronologically list the main representatives of what they call 'protopragmatics in Europe' (1785-1835) - implicitly criticizing the opinion that the main ideas of pragmatics were in fact an American invention -, 'pragmatism (1860-1930 in the United States', and 'pragmatism *avant la lettre* (1880-1935) in Europe'. By the end of the book, in part 11.5,[8] NC say something about the recent development of pragmatics in its institutionalized form, in the form Austin and Searle handed it over to the linguistic audience, i.e. without their forerunners. They have forgotten 'to hand over' their own struggle with the tradition of pragmatic ideas which actually did exist as NC show (cf. p.373).[9] And therefore a reconstruction of the theoretical 'roots' of this institutionalized' pragmatics as a part of the linguistic curriculum seems to be justified by the lack of interest in historiographical maters shown by 'the 'father' of pragmatics': Austin, and his followers (p.373).

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[8] Something must have gone wrong with the numbering of the last sections of the book. After 11.2.5 on 'Firth: the spectrum of meaning" there is a section 11.5. on "Austin: problems with statements". Obviously, sections 11.3 and 11.4 do not exist. In the table of contents, however, the section on Austin does have the number 11.3. In the text (p.13) it says: 'We shall deal with this period [between 1940 and 1970] only briefly in section 11.4." This is a nice way of 'doing things with numbers'.

[9] Austin's way to 'the promise of pragmatism" was developed in the 1940s and 1950s in relation to classical and modern analytical philosophical work. In his studies of statements he drew the conclusion that they "can in fact be nonsensical" (p.370) and not always give an adequate description of reality: language has other 'performative' functions, such as promises or orders which do not represent reality but the communicative function of language. By the way, The Promise of Pragmatism is the title of a book by John Patrick Diggins (1994; published by The University of Chicago Press) in which he undertakes an analysis of 'limitations of pragmatism from a historical perspective and dares to ask whether America's one original contribution to the world of philosophy has actually fulfilled its promise". This project is from NC's point of view not an uninteresting one.

One can criticize the way NC 'do' pragmatic historiography by choosing certain concepts, certain geographical regions, and certain 'overall' labels to cover the history of pragmatics but the way they develop pragmatic thought in different European and American regions chronologically deserves our admiration. They have limited themselves to among others linguists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists who really had something to say on the functions of language, on language use(rs) and the work is a *Fundgrube* for those interested in the history and historiography of pragmatic research. NC give a short biography of the main author's in their selection of pragmatic thinkers, they list the important primary and secondary sources for each person and link their main ideas to those of contemporary or earlier colleagues working in the field. It is, for instance, interesting to know and to consider a possible effect of the role of the *Gesammelte Schriften* of the German legal author Adolf Reinach on Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976) who owned a copy which "survives, with annotations, in the Library of Linacre College in Oxford" (p.214) or the fact that elements of pragmatic thought can as well be found in what we nowadays would call the empirical as in the rational traditions in philosophy, linguistics, etc. NC also give the original version of the English, translated quotations at the end of the book; they also add an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary literature and an index of names with dates.

It would lead a reviewer of this book too much into details if s/he would go into the careful and adequate observations made by NC. On the other hand, it would have been easier for a reviewer, if the authors would have made another choice, i.e. not to give this amount of information to the reader but had described one or two of the aforementioned sources of pragmatic research and had worked out the reception and analysis of these pragmatic themes in the texts of a more or less 'coherent' group of pragmatic thinkers - for instance around 1900 in Germany or France. Thus, NC have shown that a lot of work is still to be done in the history and historiography of pragmatics

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