

THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH IN MODERN ARABIC LINGUISTIC STUDIES: ABD AL-RAHMAN AL-HAJJ SALEH AS A MODEL

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Abstract

This study examines the pragmatic approach in modern Arabic linguistic studies, with particular focus on the contributions of Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh. It aims to define the conceptual boundaries of pragmatics and explore its reception in the Arab linguistic tradition, as well as to analyze the adequacy of its Arabic equivalents. The research adopts a descriptive-analytical method, relying on the review of both modern linguistic theories and classical Arabic scholarship, especially rhetorical studies. The findings reveal that pragmatics, as a study of language use in context, has deep roots in the Arab linguistic heritage, particularly in classical rhetoric. The study also shows that al-Hajj Saleh made significant contributions by proposing precise Arabic equivalents such as “‘ilm al-takhāṭub” (science of discourse), emphasizing language use and interaction. It concludes that his approach successfully bridges Western pragmatic theory and Arabic linguistic tradition, offering a coherent and context-sensitive framework for understanding language in use.

Keywords: Pragmatics; Arabic Linguistics; Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh; Discourse Analysis; Language Use in Context.

Introduction:

The twentieth century is considered a golden era for linguistic studies in general, due to its theoretical vitality and intellectual production, beginning with the fundamental concepts of structural linguistics established by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics*. These concepts were characterized by innovation and creativity overall, forming an epistemic turning point that influenced all subsequent linguistic studies, whether in terms of adhering to Saussure’s ideas, adopting these concepts, and attempting to enrich them—as seen in the Prague School and its work in phonetics, language functions, and structures—or in terms of building parallel models in many aspects of the structural model. By the mid-twentieth century, the ideas of Noam Chomsky, culminating in neurolinguistics and computational linguistics, brought about a second revolution in modern linguistic studies.

Amid this theoretical vitality, the pragmatic turn emerged as one of the most significant trends in linguistic research, particularly through its focus on the contextual and functional use of texts or discourse. This approach was adopted by many linguists in the Arab world, foremost among them Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh. From the above, the central research problem can be formulated as follows:

What are the conceptual boundaries of pragmatics, how has the pragmatic approach been received in the Arab world and by its key figures, did Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh develop precise Arabic equivalents for pragmatic terminology, and what contributions did his studies bring to the field of pragmatics?

1-Pragmatics: Origins and Concept

Research into the field of pragmatics has experienced a large boom over recent years due to its very broad applicability to many other human sciences and fields. Insights from sociology, psychology, linguistics, etc. have all been incorporated into the study of pragmatics. This definition is also not strictly defined, as pragmatics is based on individual language use and the communicative purposes of speakers in particular contexts. A strong foundation is found in an early statement noting that "shifting from the traditional view of language, based on the structuralism and Saussurean legacy, into a new phase of linguistics (the functional linguistic phase) helped create the context for pragmatic linguistics to emerge, as well as for all of the functional linguistic trends that arose from it or were affected by it." (Sahraoui, 2005).

The advances in pragmatics emerged primarily from the research of philosophers from the analytical school, such as J.L. Austin and his student J.R. Searle. Saussure's ideas on how language is used, the relationship between speakers, and the context in which discourse takes place, were all major contributors to the scientific development of pragmatics.

From this perspective, the concept of pragmatics has remained ambiguous, without a definition universally agreed upon by scholars. The term *pragmatics* refers broadly to "everything related to actual actions and events." (Blanche, 2007, p. 17)

Thus, the field opened by this scientific discipline, known as pragmatics, is vast and encompasses peripheral works that do not fall within institutional disciplines such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, and sema

ntics. Scholars in the field of linguistics generally agree on the difficulty of establishing precise terminological boundaries. Few researchers enter this domain without acknowledging the challenge of fully grasping it or providing a comprehensive and specific definition. In our view, this can be attributed to several reasons:

- The novelty of this field within linguistic studies.
- The relational interconnections of this approach with other linguistic disciplines, such as semantics, which overlaps with pragmatics in the study of meaning, and semiotics, which contributes non-linguistic signs to pragmatic analysis, in addition to pragmatics drawing on branches of linguistics concerned with functional aspects, such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.
- Its origins are not firmly rooted in a single source of human knowledge; pragmatics belongs both to linguistics and to psychology and sociology.
- The diversity of philosophical and intellectual approaches among researchers in this field has led to varied definitions, linking pragmatics at times to the emergence of pragmatic thought, at other times to its subject matter and functions, and sometimes to its relationships with other sciences (Sahraoui, p. 20).

The ambiguity of the term *pragmatics* is not solely due to its relationship with other sciences. The term *pragmatique* in French carries two meanings: tangible and corresponding to reality, whereas in English—the language in which most foundational texts on pragmatics were written—the word *pragmatic* generally refers to what relates to actions and real-world events. At first glance, it thus appears that the field opened by this scientific discipline, called pragmatics, is vast and is generally perceived as a somewhat obscure entity. Consequently, it is not surprising that no unified definition of pragmatics exists; rather, its concepts and definitions are discussed according to the scientific currents it intersects with or derives from, as well as according to the intellectual background and the origin of the term itself. Therefore, the variation in definitions of pragmatics is primarily due to the variability of the term and the differing perspectives of scholars regarding whether this discipline is a branch of linguistics or an

independent science founded on concepts, methods, and mechanisms that differ entirely from those of Saussurean linguistics.

Unlike linguistics, which excluded the various contexts and circumstances that produce speech, pragmatics focuses precisely on these conditions and communicative purposes. Pragmatics is defined as “the study of language use within context,” and the importance of this concept led Max Black to suggest renaming pragmatics as *contextualism*. Pragmatics examines communicative phenomena to achieve communicative effectiveness and, consequently, to ensure the success of the interactional process.

Regarding the focus on communicative phenomena as a scientific subject, this interest initially did not arise among linguists but rather among certain American philosophers of language, including the founder of semiotics, Charles Sanders Peirce, whose subject was the scientific study of signs of any kind (Al-Hajj Saleh, 2012). Pragmatics, as an independent methodological approach, was based on philosophy and the associated principles of analytical logic. This discipline later developed significantly thanks to the efforts of American philosophers of language such as J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle.

Historically, the study of language has largely neglected semantic meaning because of its complexity, and its intersection with many other areas like philosophy and psychology. In fact, even those advocates of the study of semantics, such as George Lakoff, who believe it is impossible to separate semantics from syntax, do acknowledge that participants and other extralinguistic factors (including the addressor, the addressee, and the external setting) should also be accounted for in the process of linguistic analysis (Mohamed, 2004).

Pragmatics refers to more than just being a study of language like Saussurean linguistics; it doesn't analyze language simply descriptively or as a goal in and of itself. The scope of pragmatics will incorporate all areas of study that allow for successful communication (i.e., presuppositions, contexts, implicatures, speech acts, illocutionary force, speaker-to-speaker interaction, etc.) and more.

It is worth noting that the Moroccan linguist Taha Abdel-Rahman was the first to use the term *pragmatics* in 1970, “because, in his view, it fully conveys the intended meaning by encompassing two aspects: usage and interaction.” (Hammam, 2014)

This discipline considers language from its practical, usage-based perspective, as well as the interactions that emerge through its use. Pragmatics thus focuses on studying language in its actual manifestation—that is, how it is used, how people interact through it, and how communication occurs via it.

2. The Reception of Pragmatic Studies among Arab Linguists

If we accept the principle that pragmatics generally concerns the contexts surrounding a text or discourse, the use of language in general, the relationships between the speaker and the listener, and issues related to communication, we find that many classical Arab linguists addressed these matters extensively in their works. Indeed, few of their writings are devoid of this approach, reflecting “(Bouguerra, 2008, p. 106), their deep awareness of the contexts that produce meaning and of extracting both the central and peripheral meanings of a text.” Based on this premise, classical Arab scholars, for example, derived grammatical rules by considering the coherence of meaning without neglecting linguistic usage, which is fundamentally tied to the various contexts that generate it.

The concepts and ideas of pragmatics, as defined in contemporary Western research, are already reflected in the work of classical Arab scholars, particularly in their studies of Arabic rhetoric and their focus on the mechanisms of effective expression and achieving communicative purpose. The features of pragmatics are especially evident in the work of Al-Sakkaki, who described the elements of the communicative process and linked them to the circumstances of the situation, noting that the recipient's condition and situation significantly contribute to a

proper understanding of the intended meaning. They also determine the type of speech produced by the speaker, as the recipient may be unprepared, hesitant in judgment, or even opposed to the message. Al-Sakkaki's approach can be considered a foundational establishment of the principles of pragmatics and a theoretical framework for it, as he emphasized the importance of considering the circumstances of the situation and attending to the recipient's condition within the communicative process.

3. Discourse Studies = Pragmatics

The term is considered one of the key foundations in theorization, as precise terminology facilitates the understanding and reception of a theory. Finding an equivalent term in a language other than the one in which it was originally coined is no less important than creating the term itself. In the Arab world, there is often a terminological problem, whether in attempting to provide an accurate equivalent or in defining and delimiting its concept. Here, Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh emphasizes an important point: "usage" as a means to establish a precise equivalent for the term. Usage, he argues, "is the primary source to which the terminologist and researcher must refer. One cannot claim that a given concept has no equivalent unless one has actually examined the usage of all relevant speakers, and should not rely solely on one's own usage or what is known from the usage of others in one's country." (Al-Hajj Saleh, 2008)

From this perspective, al-Hajj Saleh defines pragmatics as "studies primarily concerned with the use of language in itself, as a scientific subject whose phenomena can be subjected to laws," thereby opposing Saussure's claim that speech is individual and cannot be the subject of scientific study. Accordingly, al-Hajj Saleh translates the terms *pragmatics/pragmatique* as *discourse studies* (ilm al-takhāṭub). He argues that discourse has its own laws and is governed by principles specific to it: "The conditions of the speaker and the addressee, as they relate to the discourse and its situation, are not connected to the linguistic system itself. The connection occurs in the interlocutors' use of the language system, while what these conditions impose upon them—such as omission, addition, or any similar modification—does not concern the linguistic system, since these are purely phenomena of discourse. Language has its own system, with its features and constraints, while usage by people has other characteristics."

From this statement, one can infer a distinction between two main domains: the *science of the system* represented by modern linguistics, which studies the structures and rules of language without regard to their actual use or the communicative purposes of speakers, and *discourse studies*, which is concerned with the conditions of the speaker and listener, the discourse itself, and the contexts and circumstances that govern the communicative process.

Discourse is "an interaction between interlocutors: the speaker becomes the addressee, and the addressee becomes the speaker in turn. This entails several important facts, foremost among them that speech is rarely isolated or completely independent of what precedes or follows it; it is always a reaction or a stimulus for a reaction." The communicative process thus takes shape as a continuous chain of speech between speaker and addressee, with each exchanging roles as required by the discourse, so that the conversation shifts back and forth between them according to the demands of interaction.

Mohamed Mohamed Younes Ali, a Libyan linguist, agrees with Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh's translation of the term *pragmatics* and similarly adopts the equivalent *discourse studies* (ilm al-takhāṭub). He states: "Translating *pragmatics* as 'the science of usage' may be better than other alternatives, but I prefer its translation as *discourse studies*, which reflects the wording rather than the concept in the strict logical sense of the terms. What is meant by studies of usage falls entirely within the scope of discourse studies. Those concerned with discourse studies consider it entirely inappropriate to examine linguistic utterances in isolation from the contexts in which they are used." (Mohamed, 2018, p. 12)

The best match for the term pragmatics in terms of its meaning is discourse studies (‘ilm al-takhāṭub). The possibility of using the term the science of usage is also available, but not as accurate as the term discourse studies. All other possibilities, including pragmatics, effectiveness, or pragmatism, would be less accurate than either discourse studies or the science of usage. The term discourse studies reflects better the social and contextual aspect that is contained within the study of pragmatics.

Researchers have stated that it is an error to separate verbal utterances from the contexts in which they are expressed. The study of pragmatics should always be conducted in relation to the social context of the dialog and the interaction of verbal communication. By utilizing this method of study, it will be possible to properly understand how language is actually used, and what it communicates in regard to the context and social setting of a given utterance, rather than simply evaluating the formal linguistic aspects of an utterance without considering the situational context (the context).

To sum up, to translate and comprehend pragmatics correctly can involve studying the social setting as well as the speaker in the act of negotiation, which demonstrates the appropriateness of using the phrase "discourse studies" (‘ilm al-takhāṭub) as being a valid representation or equivalent for pragmatics.

Conclusion

Researching pragmatics requires the scholar to delve into the intellectual and philosophical foundations of this field, while carefully relating it to other disciplines with which it intersects, such as psychology and sociology. Pragmatics, as a study concerned with language use and the alignment between expressions and the contexts that produce them, has clear antecedents in classical Arab studies and was examined by various scholarly groups. However, the clearest pragmatic models are found in rhetorical studies, which focused on *‘ilm al-bayān* (the science of eloquence) and *‘ilm al-ma‘ānī* (the science of meanings), culminating in the principle of “matching speech to the requirements of the situation.”

This study concludes that Abd al-Rahman al-Hajj Saleh distinguished himself in establishing an accurate Arabic equivalent for the term *pragmatics* in accordance with its conceptual meaning. He uses the term *pragmatics* when presenting the field as a Western linguistic discipline in its original context. When grounding pragmatic studies in classical Arab linguistic heritage, he employs the term *usage* as the most suitable translation within the current conceptual framework. In other instances, he uses the term *discourse studies* (‘ilm al-takhāṭub), an equivalent that was not exclusive to al-Hajj Saleh; other Arab linguists, such as Mohamed Younes Ali, have also adopted it.

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