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1 The Field of Historical Pragmatics

1.1 Introduction

This book focuses on the ways in which the study of pragmatics has been incorporated into the study of the history of language, resulting in a new field of study, "historical pragmatics." While any language can be studied using the methodology of historical pragmatics, this book focuses on its application to the English language.

The field of English historical linguistics has a long history, becoming institutionalized as an academic field in the nineteenth century in northern Europe and Britain and arising out of philology and comparative linguistics, though the study of the history of English obviously has a much longer history. The field of pragmatics became a proper subdiscipline within linguistics only in the 1970s and 1980s, growing out of "ordinary language" philosophy – such as the work of the Anglo-American philosophers J. L. Austin and John Searle, among others (Jucker 2012b). Various changes within both historical linguistics and pragmatics set the stage for the rise of historical pragmatics, the youngest of the three disciplines. Of course, like all such developments, there are precursors and earlier work, but the field itself did not take coherent shape until the mid-1990s with the publication of the edited volume, *Historical Pragmatics: Pragmatics in the developments in the history of English* (Jucker 1995) and my own book, *Pragmatic markers in English: Grammaticalization and discourse functions* (Brinton 1996). The *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* was founded in 2000, and by 2010, the field had reached such a state of maturity that it was possible to bring out a comprehensive (700+-page) handbook of *Historical pragmatics* (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2010), involving a range of international scholars working in areas as diverse as pragmatic markers, politeness, speech acts, and religious discourse. At this point, more descriptive work began to give way to "considerations of the underlying principles in the search for explanations to better understand language use in the past" (Taavitsainen 2012: 1458). Interestingly, scholars did not initially agree upon what to call the developing field. Suggested names included "New Philology" (Fleischman 1990), "pragmatic stylistics" (Sell 1985), "post-/interdisciplinary philology"

(Sell 1994), "historical discourse analysis" or "historical text linguistics" (Enkvist and Wårvik 1987: 222), and "diachronic textlinguistics" (Fries 1983). Yet it is one of the earliest names, "historical pragmatics" (Stein 1985) which ultimately gained acceptance.

This chapter introduces you to the field of historical pragmatics. After defining historical pragmatics, the chapter explores the two sides of the name – "historical" and "pragmatics," reviewing how changes in both historical linguistics and pragmatics enabled the development of historical pragmatics. A case study from historical pragmatics (pragmatic markers) is presented in order to illustrate the nature of the field. A final section compares historical pragmatics to related fields, including historical sociolinguistics and historical sociopragmatics.

1.2 Definition(s) of Historical Pragmatics

As a combination of pragmatics (the study of language in use) and historical linguistics (the study of language variation and change), historical pragmatics can be defined as the study of language in use as it varies within historical periods and over time. Historical pragmatics thus has a dual focus: it is the study of pragmatic phenomena in earlier stages of the language (its synchronic dimension) and well as the ways in which these phenomena develop and change over time (its diachronic dimension). This dual focus is clearly captured in Jucker and Taavitsainen's definition: for them, historical pragmatics is "the study of patterns of language use in the past and how such patterns developed in the course of time" (2013: 2). Other definitions likewise capture this dual perspective:

> [T]he aim of historical pragmatics is to discover and describe patterns of past language use, how the patterns developed and how meaning was made, and what factors underlie both synchronic variation in past periods and changes in a diachronic perspective. (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 32)

> [A] field of study that wants to understand the patterns of intentional human interaction (as determined by the conditions of society) of earlier periods, the historical developments of these patterns, and the general principles underlying such developments. (Jucker 2008: 895)

In Chapter 2, §2.2 "The Scope of Historical Pragmatics" we look in more detail at these complementary sides of the field of historical pragmatics.

1.3 The Intersection of Historical Linguistics and Pragmatics

Existing at the intersection between historical linguistics and pragmatics, historical pragmatics takes from both fields: "Historical pragmatics inherits the interest in language change from historical linguistics, and the overarching concern in meaning-making practices derives from pragmatics" (Taavitsainen 2012: 1460). But the fields of linguistics and pragmatics were not obviously a good match, with differing views of fundamental matters such as the nature of language or the types of data relevant for study. Certain paradigmatic shifts in linguistics as well as adaptations in pragmatics had to occur before a union became possible: historical pragmatics is "the direct result both of the paradigm shifts in linguistics in general and the shifts within pragmatics" (Jucker 2012b: 510).

Within the generative paradigm dominant in the field of linguistics in the latter half of the twentieth century, historical studies did not hold a central place. But important changes occurred in linguistics in the last quarter of the century which brought the study of language variation and change to the forefront (see Traugott 2008: 207–210). As discussed by Taavitsainen and Jucker (2015; also Jucker 2012b; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 6–9), these changes, or "turns," as summarized in Table 1.1, facilitated the rise of historical pragmatics.

First, the "pragmatic turn" represents the change from an understanding of language as an internalized system of "competence" to the view that we would better focus on "performance," language as it is used, often variably and imperfectly. This change moved pragmatics into the mainstream. According to Taavitsainen and Jucker (2015:4), "The pragmatic turn was the most important precondition for historical pragmatics to take off as an independent field of study." Second, in the "dispersive turn," the attention of linguists began to shift from "core" areas such as phonology, morphology, and syntax to more "peripheral" or colloquial phenomena such as idioms, pragmatic markers,

Table 1.1 *Changes in the field of linguistics underlying the rise of historical pragmatics (based on Taavitsainen and Jucker 2015)*

The "pragmatic turn"	from language as internalized competence to language as externalized performance
The "dispersive turn"	from a focus on core features to a focus on peripheral features of language
The "discursive turn"	from language as a stable, homogeneous system to language as a heterogeneous system, negotiated through usage
The "sociocultural turn"	from language as an autonomous system to language as a system embedded in the sociocultural context
The "diachronic turn"	from an emphasis on synchrony to an emphasis on diachrony
The "empirical turn"	from findings about language based on native speaker intuition to findings based on empirical investigation
The "digital turn"	from qualitative analysis to quantitative analysis based on corpus findings

hesitation markers, discourse planners, turn-takers, and so on. Third, the change in understanding from language as a fixed and homogeneous system to language as a more heterogeneous system, with meanings not inherent but agreed upon through usage, is the "discursive turn." This changing view also recognizes the fuzziness of categories (e.g., between interjection, conversational routine, hesitation marker, and pragmatic marker; see Chapter 3, §3.2). Fourth, rather than viewing language as an independent system of systematic rules and conventions, language is understood as a product of the societal and cultural context and is hence dynamic and changing, often shaped by sociolinguistic factors such as age, gender, and class. This is the "sociocultural turn." Fifth, the "diachronic turn" led from an exclusive focus on the contemporary state of the language to a renewed interest in historical stages of the language and to processes of language variation and change. Sixth, the "empirical turn" represents a change in methodology: research into language rests on the empirical investigation of actual language use rather than on the intuitions of native speakers about invented examples. We see the empirical emphasis in fields such as sociolinguistics and conversation and discourse analysis, which involve the analysis of natural data. Historical linguistics, which has no access to native speaker intuition, has, of course, always relied upon textual data, but increasingly there has been an interest in "speech-related" data, as is discussed in Chapter 2, §2.5 "The 'Bad Data' Problem." Finally, the "digital turn" is the direct result of the development of computer corpora, which have facilitated the collection of large quantities of data and allowed linguists to undertake increasingly more sophisticated quantitative studies. However, as we will see (Chapter 2, §2.6 "Diachronic Corpus Pragmatics"), not all aspects of pragmatics, such as speech acts or politeness, are easily studied using corpora. The changes in linguistics detailed here go hand-in-hand with developments in the field of pragmatics, which we turn to next.

Pragmatics is the study of the contextualized use of language, focusing on how language is shaped by the situation of the verbal interaction, the interlocutors, and/or the specific communicative purposes at play: "Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" (Mey 2001: 6; italics removed). There are two main approaches to pragmatics, designated by the locations of their practitioners, namely, the "Anglo-American" approach and the "European Continental" approach (see Huang 2010, 2017a). We will see these reflected in the subfields of historical pragmatics.

The Anglo-American (or cognitive-philosophical) tradition arises out of philosophy of language and is quite narrowly circumscribed. It focuses on implicature, presupposition, deixis, reference, speech acts, and conversation analysis, often depending on invented data and native speaker intuition. It is the "systematic study of meaning by virtue of, or dependent on, the use of language" (Huang 2017a: 2). In this approach, pragmatics is a core component of language, like phonology, morphology, or syntax. It is seen as "micro-pragmatics" because of its focus on linguistic forms. "Diachronic pragmatics," a subfield of historical pragmatics which we discuss in Chapter 2, embodies this micro focus, in that it concentrates "on the interface between a linguistic structure and its communicative use across different historical stages of the same language" (Huang 2017a: 11).

The European Continental (or sociocultural-interactional) tradition takes a much broader cultural and social perspective. It embodies a functional (cognitive, social, cultural) perspective on the core linguistic components and broader areas of linguistics and beyond, such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, or discourse analysis and other social sciences (Huang 2017a: 3). For this reason, it is dubbed the "perspective approach." The European Continental tradition focuses on the cognitive or social and/or cultural contexts in which pragmatic meanings originate. While this type of pragmatics is perhaps truer to the origins of the discipline, it may seem so broad as to appear to be a "study of 'everything'" (Huang 2010: 14–15). With this expansive scope, the European Continental approach is "macro-pragmatics." We will see in Chapter 2, §2.2 that the subfield of historical pragmatics known as "historical pragmatics (proper)," understood as the study of the contextual features of historical texts at a particular time, takes a macro perspective, as does "historical socio-pragmatics" (see below, §1.5).

These delineations within the field of pragmatics remain discernible today, though increasingly there are studies which bridge the divide. But both approaches have merit: "Whereas the strength of the Anglo-American branch lies mainly in theory, and philosophical, cognitive, and formal pragmatics, the Continental tradition has much to offer in empirical work, and socio- (or societal), (cross- or inter-) cultural, and interlanguage pragmatics, to mention just a few examples" (Huang 2010: 15; bolding removed).

The rise of historical pragmatics as a discipline depended on two developments within the field of pragmatics. The first was the expansion of pragmatics to include an ever increasing variety of pragmatic phenomena as legitimate sources of study; these include pragmatic forms (pragmatic markers, address terms); interactional pragmatics (speech acts, (im)politeness, speech representation); and domains of discourse (scientific and medical discourse, newspapers, religious discourse, courtroom discourse, literary discourse, public and private correspondence). A second development was a change in the types of language data serving as the source for pragmatic study. Traditionally, pragmatics had relied either on invented or collected data; the collected data consisted primarily of (transcribed) oral conversations. Obviously, neither type of data is available for historical study. Conversational data do not exist for historical periods of the language, though it is possible to find "speech-related" data, such as witness depositions, trial transcripts, or fictional dialogue, and written colloquial data, such as personal letters, from at least Early Modern English onwards. In order for historical pragmatics to take root, it is necessary to recognize not just speech or speech-related data as a legitimate subject of investigation, but also purely written data, which constitute the majority of surviving historical documents: Written data are not simply imperfect approximations of the "real thing" (oral data), but "can be understood as communicative manifestations in their own right, and as such they are amenable to pragmatic analysis" (Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 9). The "communicative view," as Jucker and Taavitsainen designate it, "holds that both spoken and written language are forms of communication produced by speakers/writers for target audiences with communicative intentions, and language is always produced with situational constraints" (2013: 25). Hand-in-hand with this acceptance of written data as a source of pragmatic study comes a more nuanced view in which a clear-cut dichotomy between spoken and written language breaks down. Using the concepts of "language of immediacy" and "language of distance," Jucker and Taavitsainen show that these categories cut across the oral/written divide. Language of immediacy contains written documents, such as diaries, private letters, and emails as well as spoken data (i.e., face-to-face conversation). Dramatic discourse, fictional dialogue, model conversations in language-learning texts are representations of oral discourse, but they exist only in written form. Language of distance likewise contains written documents, such as academic prose or legal writing, as well as spoken data, such as public lectures or sermons, which, though written, are intended for oral delivery, and trial transcripts, depositions, and parliamentary proceedings, which are transcriptions of spoken (often rather formal) discourse (see Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 20–25). Thus, we see that discourse exists on a continuum from written to oral, all of which – given that we acknowledge their complexities – may serve as a sources for pragmatic study. We come back to the question of the data sources of historical pragmatics in Chapter 2, §2.5 "The 'Bad Data' Problem."

1.4 A Case Study: Pragmatic Markers

The case study presented here is intended to illustrate how historical pragmatics is practiced. The study of pragmatic markers, a well-known pragmatic phenomenon, has constituted a significant part of historical pragmatics since its inception. The methodology used in the study of pragmatic markers also exemplifies important approaches (form-to-function, diachronic corpus pragmatics) which we take up in Chapter 2. As is often the direction of study, we begin by looking at pragmatic markers in modern English and then turn our attention to the past. Pragmatic markers are treated in detail in Chapter 3.

In Present-day English (PDE), especially in informal oral conversation, one frequently encounters words and fixed phrases or clauses that appear to be semantically rather empty. They are syntactically independent of the sentence to which they are attached, and hence are moveable and appear to be omissible. Studies of contemporary spoken discourse have shown these forms to be pragmatically rich, providing information about the nature of the surrounding discourse, the speaker's subjective opinions, and/or the relation between the speaker and the hearer. They are known as "discourse markers," or "pragmatic markers." Table 1.2 provides some examples from the *Corpus of Contemporary American English* (COCA) of single-word (*like*, *well*, *so*, *now*), phrasal (*and stuff*, *all right*, *of course*, *kind of*, *by the way*), and reduced clausal (*you know*, *you see*, *I mean*, *let's see*, *I guess*) pragmatic markers.

The forms shown in Table 1.2 meet the definition of pragmatic markers. They are:

> (a) invariable expressions which are (b) semantically and syntactically independent from their environment, (c) set off prosodically from the rest of the utterance in some way, and (d) their function is metatextual, relating a text to the situation of discourse and serving the organization of texts, the attitudes of the speaker, and/ or speaker–hearer interaction. (Heine et al. 2021: 6)

Pragmatic markers are marginal in word class, though in their independence, they show an affinity to interjections (and are often described as such in dictionaries). They may be identical in form to adverbs, conjunctions, or prepositions (from which they are assumed to derive historically), as in the case of *now*, *so*, and *like* in Table 1.2, though they differ in position and function. Typically, pragmatic markers exist outside the syntactic structure, in a separate intonation group, and as a consequence are moveable. While most often occurring in sentence-initial position, they are less often found sentence-medial or final. They are typically fixed in form; thus, only *I mean*, but not *I am*

Table 1.2 *Examples of pragmatic markers from COCA*

but I could never **like** memorize all those words.	(1998 COCA: FIC)
Well, you know, it's also one of the things I love about, **you know**, where I'm at in my life and my career.	(2010 COCA: SPOK)
Like his grandparents get to take him to the zoo **and stuff.**	(2011 COCA: SPOK)
All right. **Now**, **you see**, you mix that together.	(2007 COCA: SPOK)
Anyway, **by the way**, we have that extra feature on our Web site now	(2008 COCA: SPOK)
Oh, **let's see**. **So**, **of course**, my father wanted me to go to college,	(2019 COCA: SPOK)
So, **I mean**, who knows, **you know**, he's putting words in his mouth.	(2019 COCA: SPOK)
I guess, **kind of**, I've been married since I was 21	(2006 COCA: SPOK)

meaning or *I really mean* or *I meant*, can function as a pragmatic marker. However, especially the phrasal and clausal forms may allow some degree of variability, such as *and stuff / and other stuff / and all that stuff / and all this stuff / and lots of stuff*. Significantly, they lack semantic content, with their original literal meaning bleached or absent. Thus, *you know* usually has little to do with what the addressee has cognition of, and may not even be directed at a specific addressee. The presence of pragmatic markers in a discourse is syntactically optional, but may be pragmatically necessary in order to produce natural, fully communicatively comprehensible oral discourse.

Pragmatic markers do not contribute to the syntax or semantics of the sentence to which they are attached but rather function at a more global scope, contributing on the level of the text or on the level of the speaker–hearer. "Textual" functions are related to how the discourse or exchange is organized. Thus, introducing, shifting, or resuming a topic, denoting what is new and old information, marking a new episode, distinguishing between foregrounded and backgrounded information, and so on, can all be achieved by the use of pragmatic markers. In a conversational exchange, pragmatic markers can also initiate or close a discourse, claim the attention of the hearer, and acquire, hold, or relinquish the floor. On the "interpersonal" level, pragmatic markers may be used by the speaker subjectively to express a response or reaction to the preceding or following discourse, denote an attitude, signal understanding or continued attention, or hedge an opinion. They may also function intersubjectively to effect cooperation or sharing, show intimacy, confirm shared assumptions, check on understanding, request confirmation, express deference, or save face (politeness). The range of pragmatic functions is vast, and individual pragmatic markers are often multifunctional.

For the historical pragmaticist, the question is whether pragmatic markers existed (or can be found) in earlier stages of the language, where records of naturally occurring oral discourse are absent or rare and fictional representations of speech may be highly stylized. Even with historical trial transcripts and depositions, which might be thought to approximate real oral discourse, there is the added possibility that pragmatic forms might be edited out by scribes, transcribers, or copyists. This is the "bad data" problem of historical pragmatics that we discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Scholars have often noted the existence of what Longacre (1976) calls "mystery particles" in earlier English; these are semantically empty and grammatically unnecessary forms. Traditionally they are seen as defects of style, or evidence of a more paratactic, primitive, or simply clumsy style. In a more positive light, they may be seen as

(a) metrical expedients used to add syllables to a line of verse;
(b) markers of emphasis, intensity, or vividness; or
(c) residues from an earlier period of transmission in which information was structured as it is in oral discourse.

The presence of "mystery particles" in earlier texts, forms which resemble pragmatic markers in important ways, raises a series of questions: Do these forms function like pragmatic markers in Present-day English? More generally, have language users always expressed pragmatic functions? If so, what forms have they used, what factors influence their use, and how has the inventory of such forms changed over time? How do such forms develop? Why are some forms lost and others preserved?

In examples, (1) to (3), I provide some examples of "mystery particles" in Old English (OE), Middle English (ME), and Early Modern English (EModE), respectively. Because they are semantically bleached or empty, they are often difficult to translate into PDE, but approached from a historical pragmatic perspective, we can see that these forms serve important pragmatic functions. *Ða* (and lower-case *þa*) 'then' is a ubiquitous form in OE prose, often as in example (1a) beginning sequential sentences. The 'then . . . then . . . then . . . ' structure, traditionally dismissed as a sign of a primitive paratactic style, has undergone significant reassessment. Enkvist (1986) was the first to observe that *þa* "does its main job or jobs at text and discourse level" (301). He argues that *þa* is a marker of foregrounded action, that is, actions which advance the plot of the story. It may also act as a foreground "dramatizer," allowing the narrator to bring to the fore a stative (and otherwise backgrounded) element. Enkvist identifies a number of other discourse functions, such as sequencer of events, peak marker, and narrative segmenter. Lenker (2000) shows that OE *witodlice*, an adverb meaning 'certainly', occurs in initial position outside the syntactic structure; here its literal meaning is bleached, as in (1b). Like *þa*, *witodlice* does discourse work, serving to introduce new episodes, at points where there is a change in time, location, participants, action sequence, and so on; that is, it serves as a boundary marker. OE *hwæt þa*, literally meaning 'what then', has caused translators difficulties, being rendered as 'so then', 'lo then', 'well then', 'moreover', 'thereupon', 'whereupon', 'behold', an so on. In Brinton (1996: 193–197, 2017c: 57–60), I argue that *hwæt þa* indicates a causal relation between the preceding event and the following event, or as in the case of (1c), signals that the following event is understood as a conclusion from the preceding event. Thus, like *so* in Present-day English, it may denote 'result' (*John is sick*, *so he is at home*) or function like "inferential *so*" (*John's lights are on*, *so he is at home*; that is, 'so I infer that he is at home', not *'as a result he is at home').

(1) a. **Þa** for he norþryhte be þæm lande; let him ealne weg þæt weste land on ðæt steorbord 7 þa widsæ on ðæt bæcbord þrie dages. **Ða** wæs he swa feor norþ swa þa hwælhuntan firrest faraþ. **Ða** for he þa giet norþryhte swa feor swa he meahte on þæm oþrum þrim dagum gesiglan. (Or 1 81–83; DOEC[1])

[1] Quotations from Old English in this book follow the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (DOEC) and the textual abbreviations used there.

'Then he travelled northwards along the coast; keeping all the way the waste land on the starboard and the open sea on the portside for three days. Then he was as far north as the whale hunters go furthest. Then he travelled still northwards as far as he could sail in another three days' (translation of Enkvist and Wårvik 1987: 234)

b. **Witodlice** betwux þæs heortes hornum glitenode gelicnys þære halgan Cristes rode breohtre þonne sunnan leoma, (LS 8 [Eust] 41; DOEC; Lenker 2000: 240)

'Behold, between the hart's horn glittered the likeness of Christ's holy rood, brighter than the sun's beam' (Walter Skeat's translation)

c. Ða sende Eugenia þa twægen halgan, Protum and Iacinctum to ðam hæðenen mædene. **Hwæt þa** Basilla mid blysse hi underfæng, and . . . (ÆLS [Eugenia] 102–3; DOEC; Brinton 2017b: 59)

'Then Eugenia sent the two saints, Protus and Jacinctus, to the heathen maid. What then Basilla received them with joy and . . . '

In (2a), ME *gan*, related to PDE *began* (from OE *biginnan*), cannot be translated literally. As punctual actions, awaking and noticing do not allow a breakdown into stages: one can 'awake' and 'notice' but not *'begin to awake' or *'begin to notice'. The occurrence of *gan* in these semantically incompatible contexts and its frequency in ME verse have led scholars to suggest that it is a meaningless tense carrier often employed as a metrical expedient, allowing the infinitive to appear in end position. An analysis of the position of *gan* in the narrative structure of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, however, points to a discourse-structuring function as well as an evaluative function: it marks significant transitions or junctures in the narrative plot and denotes structurally significant transitions, or "pivotal events," in the plot sequence (Brinton 1996: 75–78). ME *anon* literally means 'at once, immediately, instantly', but its repetition in sequential sentences in (2b) suggests that it no longer denotes a sense of urgency. Rather, it marks more foregrounded or plot-advancing actions that are causally, thematically, or humanly important in the context of the narrative; it emphasizes the sequence of events (Brinton 1996: 97–101). Sentence-final *than* in (2c) does not seem to be functioning as an adverb of time meaning 'then'. Instead, it seems to be a signal for the hearer to interpret the preceding clause as a conditional *if*-clause ('if you are clean') and the clause to which it attaches as the conclusion ('then God will make you holy') (Haselow 2012).

(2) a. And **gan** awake, and wente hire out to pisse,/ And cam agayn, and **gan** hir cradel mysse (1387 Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, A.Rv. 4215–16; Brinton 1996: 68)[2]

[2] Quotations from Chaucer in this book follow Benson (1986). The dating of the *Canterbury Tales* is difficult to determine (see Benson 1986: xxix); I will use the approximate date of 1387.