

# **IPrA and the Theme of 2019 IPRA Conference**

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1<sup>st</sup> National Workshop on Pragmatic Research,  
Held at Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, from July 17-19

**Pragmatics of the Margins, The (non-exclusive) theme for IPrA  
Conference 16: Some Personal Comments  
Proposal**

The (non-exclusive) theme for IPC 16, Pragmatics of the Margins, aims to reflect the position of Hong Kong. HK is a place in which post-coloniality, marginalization and entanglement are salient and omnipresent tropes in public discourse.

**Pragmatics of the Margins, The (non-exclusive) theme  
for IPrA Conference 16: Some Personal Comments  
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In Hong Kong, democratization is a much discussed theme and a source of pressure and disagreement, with questions of who historically has been marginalized, and, after the handover to China, who is newly marginalized and who continues to be? How might those at the margins speak back to ‘the middle’ and be heard? How might they effect change?

These same questions, recurrent in the Hong Kong media, are also often applied to the democratization of intellectual spaces, including pragmatics in its various manifestations. There has long been a sense that academia should be ‘decentred’ from its Eurocentric theoretical biases. Yet equally enduring has been a sense that, in spite of intention, theoretical decentring does not ultimately take place.

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Rather, the metropole continues to conceptualise theory based on local data that is not imagined as local, whereas the global periphery continues to provide mainly raw data.

In addition to such geopolitical margins, epistemological hegemonies within societies also show stubborn resistance to decentring, with gendered, linguistic, political, religious, sexual, socio-cultural, and socio-economic margins also requiring closer examination.

The aim of this conference theme is to place all pragmatics scholarship in the margins and ask how Pragmatics can gain from engagement with ‘dirty theory’ (Connell 2007), or theorization on the ground on which the researcher’s boots are planted.

Most importantly how can this conference contribute to democratization of the research imagination in pragmatics? What would a ‘dirty pragmatics’ look like?

That is, what can be achieved when all pragmatics research is framed as taking place in the ‘dirty’ margins, linked not by universalizing theories but via messy entanglements; epistemologically interdependent and mutually constitutive.

Local data (regardless of its geopolitical origins) is viewed as local data and no theoretical leaps are made in order to universalize its insights.

Rather, theorizing is done locally and there is ‘crossfertilization’ of ideas via entangled relations of social, cultural, economic and epistemological interdependency (Cooper and Stoler 1997; see also Nuttall 2009).

More specifically:

- How does pragmatics interact with ‘the margins’ in multiple conceptualizations?
- What are the pragmatics of various phenomena in postcolonial conditions?
- How can pragmatics from the metropole avoid epistemological hegemony?
- How can scholars ‘talk back’ to theory locally regardless of their geopolitical location?
- What are the entanglements that allow these localized insights to transcend dichotomies such as core/periphery or north/south?
- What are the implications for pragmatics of dirty theory as opposed to universalizing theory?

The conference aims to provide a platform for researchers and research students from around the world to discuss these themes of margin and entanglement via numerous sub-topics that are relevant to the theme.

All are invited to submit proposals for individual papers, panels and poster displays that address any topic relevant to the theme, including the following examples (in random order and non-exhaustive):

The conference aims to provide a platform for researchers and research students from around the world to • Meaning and Social Context

- Workplace
- Diversity
- Globalization
- Multilingualism
- Digital Technology
- Identity
- Social Change
- Peace and Conflict

- Politics
- Metaphor
- Embodiment
- Multimodality

## References

Connell R. 2007. *Southern Theory: The Global Dynamics of Knowledge in Social Science*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cooper F. and A. L. Stoler (eds). 1997. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Nuttall S. 2009. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

## **Key Phrases from the Proposal**

Hong Kong, post-coloniality, marginalisation, democratisation, entanglement de-centring and multiple conceptualisations ('dirty theory')

The conception of the proposal covers the content and perspectives of discussions to be engaged in using pragmatic theories.

## **The focus is Hong Kong, but issues are international**

The city is foregrounded as the venue of the conference and, thus, provides the context for the interaction.

Many scholars from Hong Kong would attend the conference, thus it is an opportunity for them to interrogate relevant social-political issues through the lenses of pragmatics.

Of course, the issues of post-coloniality, marginalisation and democratisation are relevant tropes in public and academic discourse across many nations of the world.

The issues are prominent in linguistic, literary, historical, philosophical and social-political research in Nigeria.

**Post-coloniality** in the literature (Said, Bhabba and Spivak) has to do with the concepts of otherness (in terms of identity and difference), resistance (freedom, liberty, identity or individuality) as subversion, opposition or mimicry), uniting local conceptions with western conceptions, centralised economic and cultural system that is either western import or hybridised.

The concept has been addressed mainly from literary and historical perspectives, and, especially, through reports in the news media.

**Marginalisation** is a concept that connects with all other concepts mentioned here. It is broad-based and has been covered in many disciplines of the humanities. It has also been well addressed in sociolinguistics (under topics of bilingualism and multilingualism), critical linguistics or discourse analysis and literature (especially sexist or feminist discourse).

Interrogation of the concept has brought up oppositions such as majority v. minority, superior v. subordinate/subaltern, presence v. absence/silence, dominance v. oppression and centre/core v. periphery.

Major demographic factors are used for demonstration, including gender, age, ethnicity, education, race, social class, occupation and linguistic hegemony

**Democratisation** broadly refers to the processes involved in the transition to a more democratic political regime or the substantive political changes observed in moving in a democratic direction.

The factors that affect or limit democratisation are many, including wealth, social capital, education, protests, natural resources and foreign trade or intervention; and the benefits derivable are equality, inclusive participation, justice and respect for human rights.

This concept has been mainly described in political science, political philosophy and reports of social activism.

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In Hong Kong, democratization is a much discussed theme and a source of pressure and disagreement, with questions of who historically has been marginalized, and, after the handover to China, who is newly marginalized and who continues to be?

How might those at the margins speak back to ‘the middle’ and be heard? How might they effect change? These same questions, recurrent in the Hong Kong media, are also often applied to the democratization of intellectual spaces, including pragmatics in its various manifestations.

There has long been a sense that academia should be ‘decentred’ from its Eurocentric theoretical biases. Yet equally enduring has been a sense that, in spite of intention, theoretical decentring does not ultimately take place.

Rather, the metropole continues to conceptualise theory based on local data that is not imagined as local, whereas the global periphery continues to provide mainly raw data.

In addition to such geopolitical margins, epistemological hegemonies within societies also show stubborn resistance to decentring, with gendered, linguistic, political, religious, sexual, socio-cultural, and socio-economic margins also requiring closer examination.

**Entanglement** refers to factors that limit action, movement or change despite perceived resistance or opposition to existence, creations or actions of anti-democratic phenomena of exclusion, discrimination, marginalisation and oppression.

The conference proposal identifies lack of ‘democratisation of intellectual spaces’ as a major source of entanglement. This is manifested in many ways, academic and non-academic, as follows:

Euro-centric theoretical biases in the academia or ‘northern hegemonic metapragmatics overfeeds global pragmatics at the expense of the southern periphery’ (see Adebayo Lawal’s presentation later in this workshop);

Overconcentration of power at the centre hampers effective governance at federating units, e.g. in Nigeria;

Conditions of ‘onshore’ (local) v. offshore (overseas/international) publication and publication in high impact journals concentrated in the West encourages academic flight from the South.

Provision of academic scholarships favours upward movements from the South to the North.

## **Decentring and Multiple Conceptualisations ('dirty theory')**

The IPrA conference proposal poses a challenge thus:

In spite of intention, theoretical decentring does not ultimately take place. Rather, the metropole continues to conceptualise theory based on local data that is not imagined as local, whereas the global periphery continues to provide mainly raw data.

Pragmatics scholars in Nigeria are thus encouraged to provide original alternative theories to conceptualisations from the West.

Data for research should derive from indigenous contexts in the local languages and second language usage of English. Theories for analysing the data may utilise fresh concepts from linguistics and social theory without necessary recourse to pre-existing euro-centric concepts.

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Scholars should avoid wholesale application of theories of native speakers' English to describe second language users' English. For example, many theories of pragmatics such as Grice's 'conversational maxims', Austin and Searle's speech act theory, relevance theory, the various theories of politeness and impoliteness and pragmatic acts theory cannot apply wholesale to local contexts of communication in Nigeria.

Thus, the theories have to be adapted or reformulated to suit the non-host Nigerian English contexts.

## **Decentring Contd**

Many papers that attempt innovations are declined offer of acceptance by international journals abroad on the basis that ‘analysis does not meet the interest of our international audience’.

Scholars are welcomed to publish such innovative researches in standard journals locally instead of forcing them into unsuitable structures to meet Euro-centric acceptance. Our voices too must be heard to describe our experiences in whatever manner we express them.

## **Decentring Contd**

Theorising that proceeds inductively from observations of data, like the synchronization method employed in conversation analysis would have a greater potential of originality than theorising that is based on structuration, i.e. utilises pre-existing structures, such as the 'Birmingham School' descriptive framework of discourse analysis.

Nigerian scholars, especially senior academics, should develop and promote local journals to the status of high impact journals by publishing in them. Since visibility and number of citations are requirements for webometric ranking, editors of journals are advised to use online facilities adequately, while scholars should cite adequately local researches that are relevant to their studies.

## Decentring Contd

Funding organisations of scholarship and fellowships are to encourage reciprocal movement of scholars from the North and South institutions of learning.

Authorities of higher institutions of Nigeria are to regulate the condition of 'onshore-offshore publications' with patriotic intentions. Percentage requirements differ in universities, but a university that has 80% requirement of foreign publications for scholars in Nigeria can be accused of Euro-centrism and bias against 'glocalisation', i.e. locating the local in the global world.

# Perspectives of Pragmatic Analysis

Five perspectives are identified from the literature on the subject.

1. Pragmatics as a component of semantics, i.e. 'semanticism'. In a very broad perspective of semantics, as the study of meaning, pragmatics may be considered narrowly as a level of the study of meaning that accounts for contextual meaning of utterances.

SEMANTICS → Phonology + Syntax + Lexis + Context

2. Pragmatics as inclusive of semantics, i.e. 'pragmaticism'. Pragmatics is perceived here as a wider concept of meaning of which semantics is a part.

PRAGMATICS → Semantics (Phonology, Syntax and Lexis) + Context

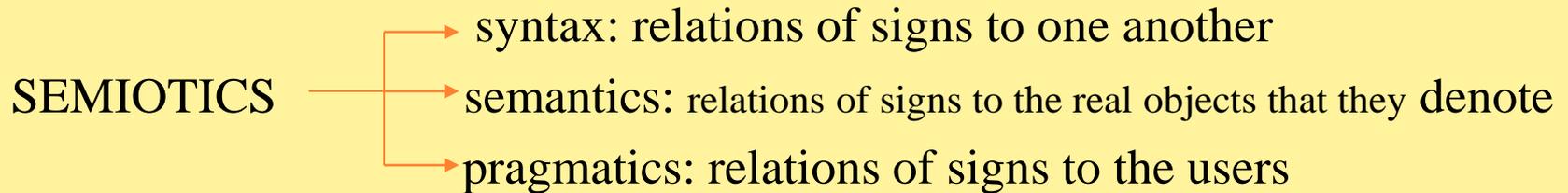
3. Pragmatics refers to speaker meaning, as opposed to sentence meaning which belongs to the realm of semantics.

PRAGMATICS → Speaker Meaning

┌ Level 1: Reference & Sense  
└ Level 2: Force

## Perspectives Contd

4. In the conception of language within a general theory of sign systems, known as semiotics, pragmatics is recognized as one of the three inter-related levels of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. While syntax relates signs to one another, semantics relates signs to their real objects and pragmatics relates signs to users of a language.



5. Pragmatics is a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage as forms of behavior. Verschueren (1999) claims that pragmatics is a perspective and not a component or just another interdisciplinary level of linguistic studies. For example, it is not a component like phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. So, also, it is not an interdisciplinary level like stylistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, neurolinguistics, each of which has its own extra-linguistic correlational object(s).

## **Pragmatic Context and Data Base**

As stated in the proposal, the following areas provide the context and data base for paper submissions:

geopolitical margins, epistemological hegemonies within societies also show stubborn resistance to decentring, with gendered, linguistic, political, religious, sexual, socio-cultural, and socio-economic margins also requiring closer examination.

See also the contexts provided in Slide 6.

## **Conclusion**

The IPrA conference is a very big international event, well attended and well organised. Attending the conference is a wonderful experience for a pragmatics scholar. The conference invites presentations in forms of panels, paper and posters.

Presentations around the subthemes are encouraged, but scholars are also welcomed to present their research efforts in any areas of pragmatics scholarship.

The comments in this presentation explain the key concepts in the proposal of the 2019 conference and examines the implications of the subthemes for pragmatics in Nigerian studies. Best wishes for all intended participants at the conference.