ADVANCEMENT OF PRAGMATICS: OPEN QUESTIONS

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On the happy occasion of celebrating the eightieth birthday of a leading scholar and friend of many years, it is customary to present and evaluate scholarly contributions that he or she has made during the exemplary glaring career. However, Jacob Mey is not only a scholar and friend, but also a young octogenarian. An appropriate celebration of his birthday should focus both on the past of Pragmatics, to which he has contributed so significantly and persistently, and on the future of Pragmatics, to which all of us are expected to contribute on grounds of what veterans of Pragmatics, such as Jacob, have set.

In the present chapter of Jacob Mey’s Festschrift we focus on the future of Pragmatics in general and speech act theory in particular. We put forward 1 general question about Pragmatics in general and 10 questions we would like to see properly answered during the coming period, years, or decades of research in speech act theory within Pragmatics. We take these questions to be of fundamental significance. Any adequate answer will reflect a theory of language use or some aspects thereof. Accordingly, it will be couched in terms of a certain broad and general conceptual framework, will be supported by general theoretical statements, on the one hand, and corroborated by prevalent intuitions or empirical studies, on the other hand.

Most of our questions are related to speech act theory because this classical topic has not flourished as one had reasons for expecting it would. There are additional topics of similar depth, interest, and importance, such as theories of implicatures, reference, and relevance. We leave the presentation and discussion of the related questions to the next Jacob Mey Festschrift, to be written on the occasion of his 90th birthday!

Here are our questions. The presentation of each of them is followed by a brief explanation.
1. **What is the Best Division of Pragmatics?**

Under the general title of “Pragmatics,” one finds a highly heterogeneous class of investigations. For evidence, suffice it to have a glance at the table of contents of any volume of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, as edited by Jacob Mey since he founded it decades ago.

Apparently, there is nothing wrong in a term being used for denoting a highly heterogeneous class of phenomena. As we all have learnt from Wittgenstein, natural semantics on the lexical level involves a “family resemblance” of elements that are denoted by the same notion.

However, given the history of the usage of the term “pragmatics,” one may take its employment for denoting a certain investigation not as an ordinary usage of a term that has a given denotation, but rather as an attempt to shape the future denotation of the term, at least to a certain extent. Moreover, such an attempt to shape the denotation of the term “pragmatics” is actually an attempt to shape the nature of the related field of investigation, dubbed “Pragmatics”.

A question, then, arises whether the highly heterogeneous nature of the investigations one finds under the same title of “Pragmatics” should be regarded as a field of investigation, a family of investigations, or rather a cluster of different investigations that are not related to each other in any significant way. Put differently, in terms of the related philosophy of science: Should we have a research program the ultimate goal of which is a unified theory of language use into which will be incorporated all types of investigation now denoted by “Pragmatics”?

Our view is that a research program the ultimate end of which is a unified theory of language use will have to divide whatever is denoted by “Pragmatics” into two major parts, namely a wide variety of investigations that should eventually converge into aspects of the same overarching theory of language use, and another wide variety of investigations that should be ignored, being the subject matter of another research program and its own theories. Although we have suggested such a delineation, we still put forward the first question as an issue to be discussed and practically concluded on grounds of a broad scholarly consensus.

2. **What is a Naturally Possible Speech Act Type?**

Every speaker of a natural language knows a variety of speech act types. One’s knowledge of a speech act type is manifest in one’s production of speech acts of that type and understanding of such speech acts when performed in one’s presence.

We assume that it makes sense to ask about each and every element of linguistic knowledge, manifest in a speaker of a natural language, whether it is an innate element of knowledge or an acquired one. Speech act types are no exception. Hence, when we have, for example, a full