

SHIFTING FROM COGNITIVE PRAGMATICS TO INTERNET PRAGMATICS

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Abstract. Cognitive pragmatics, and specifically relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995), offers a picture of how communication is realized and how interpretations are reached with the aid of context. Based on an evolved mental criterion that seeks to identify the most relevant interpretation among a set of possibilities, relevance theory seeks to explain the inferential strategies which build meaningful interpretations after decoding the schematic meaning of the words. The present paper aims to show that relevance theory must be adjusted and adapted when applied to internet communication, that is, when shifting from cognitive pragmatics to internet pragmatics.

Keywords: cognitive pragmatics, relevance theory, internet pragmatics, context.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics, which encompasses cognitive pragmatics and relevance theory (henceforth RT), emphasizes the role of context when hearers turn the schematic linguistic input (context-free literal meaning) into meaningful and contextualized explicit and/or implicated interpretations. Specifically, “pragmatics seeks to understand how we go beyond what has been literally and directly said by a speaker and to work out what the speaker meant to communicate by producing a particular utterance in a particular context” (Scott 2023). Applying this general pragmatics-based view to internet communication appears to be straightforward, though it is important that internet-specific characteristics are accounted for, such as the role of interfaces in the eventual (un)successful outcome of online interactions, the different qualities of online contexts, the varied ways in which interactions occur in online environments compared to offline ones, the different modes in which discourses are coded and transferred to other users (not only textual or visual, but also multimodal), and the role of the non-propositional information (feelings and emotions) which stems from these online interactions (Yus 2023a).

Context is crucial in pragmatics, but especially so in relevance theory, because the speaker’s prediction of the interlocutor’s access to context and the interlocutor’s subsequent context accessibility can lead to different inferential directions when interpreting the same utterance. This is exemplified by the varied implicated interpretations of Jane’s utterance in (1), which depend on prominent and accessible contextual information (*assumptions* in RT terminology) such as (2–4):

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- (1) Jack: Where is your cat?
Jane: My sister has come.
- (2) Prominent contextual assumption: Every time Jane's sister visits her, she takes her cat to the garden to play with it.
Implicature 1: The cat is in the garden with Jane's sister.
- (3) Prominent contextual assumption: Jane's sister is terrified of being around cats and every time she visits Jane, she asks a neighbor to look after it.
Implicature 2: The cat is with a neighbor.
- (4) Prominent contextual assumption: Jane's sister offered to take the cat to the vet today.
Implicature 3: The cat is at the vet.

As already mentioned, these possible interpretations are not random but the outcome of the hearer's inherent search for relevance. The hearer's retrieval of contextual information is also predicted by the speaker upon producing the utterance, with fine-grained expectations concerning the mutuality of information. This is, of course, the picture of the prototypical act of communication, i.e., orally expressed and in a face-to-face setting. The main objective of this paper is to show how internet communication entails challenges to and rearrangements of this prototypical situation.² This is clearly the case for types of information transmission other than propositions, including non-propositional effects (feelings, emotions, etc.) and images or multimodal discourses that are particularly pervasive online nowadays. A famous quote by Sperber and Wilson (1995: 57) is illustrative in this respect:

No one has any clear idea how inference might operate over non-propositional objects: say, over images, impressions or emotions. Propositional contents and attitudes thus seem to provide the only relatively solid ground on which to base a partly or wholly inferential approach to communication. Too bad if much of what is communicated does not fit the propositional mould.

The next Section will present a brief outline of the prototypical act of communication according to RT. It will subsequently be re-interpreted for online communication as part of the shift from cognitive pragmatics to internet pragmatics.

2. THE PROTOYPICAL OFFLINE ACT OF COMMUNICATION

2.1. Predictions and utterance production

Contrary to what is typically assumed, the act of communication does not begin with an utterance or outward nonverbal behavior on the part of the speaker. Instead,

² Lewis (2024) lists a few crucial differences that impact the way communication is achieved in online settings as compared to face-to-face scenarios: (a) physical (co-)presence is no longer required; (b) time constraints are relaxed (e.g., asynchronous communication); (c) the potential for anonymity; (d) visibility across contexts may occur to different degrees; and (e) the social presence of the users involved is often limited.

communication starts when speakers make predictions about their interlocutor's context accessibility and about which of their accessible information (the interlocutor's *cognitive environment* in RT terminology) intersects with that of the speaker, to the extent that speakers shape their utterances according to these predictions. Consider the dialogue in (5):

- (5) Frank: Hi John! Great to see you! How are you?
 John: Not too bad.
 Frank: Did you take my advice and sort that out?
 John: Yes, I had enough... I asked her for it... I couldn't stand it anymore.
 Frank: Glad to hear that... You deserve better!

While this dialogue probably does not make sense to the prospective reader of this paper, it clearly does to these interlocutors, because the entire dialogue is based on the premise that both share crucial contextual information for successful utterance interpretation. As already mentioned, each interlocutor has a so-called *cognitive environment* made up of all the information that each of them has access to during a specific communicative situation (*manifest assumptions* in RT terminology). When the interaction (5) takes place, Frank and John expect that some background contextual information will be accessible to them both, i.e., information that intersects their cognitive environments and is therefore *mutually manifest* to both of them (i.e., placed in their *mutual cognitive environment*, following the RT terminology). This includes the information (contextual assumptions) listed in (6):

- (6) John has talked to me about how bad his marriage is.
 John's marriage is now unbearable.
 John has told me how depressed he has become.
 I advised John to contact a lawyer for advice on this situation.

Given both interlocutors' accessibility to such information, it is not difficult to infer that the referent for *that* in "sort that out" is John's situation in his marriage; that some unarticulated constituents that follow "I had enough" are in reference to, e.g., "of this unbearable marriage"; that the referent for *her* is John's wife; and the referent for the two instances of *it* is "the divorce" and "this situation" respectively.

2.2. Multiplicity and choice of interpretations

Notice that in the exchange (5) above there are many possible interpretations for each utterance by Frank and John, e.g., a myriad of referents for *her* or *it*. However, context "pushes" them towards a specific relevance-seeking inferential direction. The resulting explicit interpretations (or *explicature* in RT terminology) of the final part of the exchange above could be something along these lines (7):

- (7) Frank: Did you take my advice and sort out [your marriage situation]?
 John: Yes, I had enough [of this unbearable marriage]... I asked [my wife] for [the divorce]... I couldn't stand [this unbearable situation] anymore.

2.3. Context prediction and accessibility

The interpretation in (7) above illustrates one of the main claims by RT, namely, that there is a more or less substantial informative gap between what is coded in an utterance (i.e., said, written, typed) and what is meant by the speaker and eventually interpreted by the addressee. Indeed, as summarized in Yus (2022), according to the *underdeterminacy thesis* (see Carston 2002), two informational gaps must be filled, both between what speakers say and what they intend to communicate, and between what is said and what hearers eventually pick up as an interpretation. These gaps are summarized in (8) below:

- (8) a. What the speaker intends to communicate.
[only resembles...].
- b. What the speaker literally says.
[only resembles...].
- c. What the hearer eventually interprets.

Interestingly, in exchange (5), while the utterances have multiple possible interpretations, both Frank and John follow a path requiring the least mental effort, guided by relevance criteria consisting of (a) to consider interpretations in order of accessibility, and (b) to stop when the expectations of relevance are satisfied. In this case, accessibility to contextual assumptions such as the ones listed in (6) above makes one interpretation more salient and bound to be the one intended by the speaker. Context becomes key not only in cases such as (5) above involving an explicit interpretation such as (7), but especially in the case of implicated interpretations such as the ones listed in (2–4) above. In all cases, increased accessibility to certain contextual information (i.e., the fact that a set of assumptions acquire prominence while interpreting an utterance) invariably leads to radically different inferential outcomes for the same utterance across contexts and communicative situations.

3. THE ONLINE ACT OF COMMUNICATION

As was emphasized in Yus (2022), when applying cognitive pragmatics to internet-mediated communication, two apparently contradictory statements seem to arise. On the one hand, *the internet makes no difference*, in the sense that in this virtual environment users also interpret other users' utterances with the aid of context; they select interpretations according to existing contextual support; they engage in (a)synchronous conversations; they store, update, and reproduce social meanings via interactions, etc. As such, applications of cognitive pragmatics to online communication should prove straightforward. However, it is also true that *the internet makes all the difference*, since virtual communication often takes place in a cues-filtered environment; is typically text-based (even nowadays); and has fewer options and resources for contextualization (e.g., lack of nonverbal support and physical co-presence, etc.).³ In this sense, a challenge that analysts face when applying pragmatics to

³ See Parini (2014: 148–149) for the specific features of digital environments that frame internet-mediated communication. Furthermore, several comparisons between online and offline environments can be found in the existing bibliography. These include (a) the idea that online and

internet communication (i.e., internet pragmatics) is that the prototypical kind of human interaction is altered or blurred in this virtual medium. As was commented upon in Yus (2015), communication on the Net frequently entails a radical reinterpretation of the traditional communication schema. This reinterpretation will suit some users (those eager for more dynamic forms of interaction, who enjoy participating in the act of communication and take full responsibility for making interpretive decision and choosing where to click) while discouraging others (who prefer a more traditional way of interpreting discourses). In a similar fashion, Xie and Yus (2021: 456) remark that internet-mediated communication is continually evolving, and sites or apps for interaction, together with options for coding and interpreting utterances, are also changing constantly. Finally, Jones (2020: 29) emphasizes the fact that the rise of technologies such as those used on social media and in mobile communication “has problematised cognitive understandings of context, making it more difficult for people both to negotiate shared understandings of context with others and to determine what information is relevant in particular situations”. The rest of this paper is an illustration of why online communication makes a difference when compared to offline face-to-face communication and why the shift from cognitive pragmatics to internet pragmatics is not straightforward but needs to take into account certain (internet-specific) qualities and elements.

3.1. Predictions and discourse production

When engaging in face-to-face interactions with an interlocutor with whom a certain amount of contextual information is supposedly shared, it is fairly easy to predict that the shift from the words uttered to a relevant contextualized interpretation will not be problematic. This is true even though, as in the conversation between Frank and John above, there are specific words that need contextualization (indexicals, unarticulated constituents, etc.). Needless to say, this is mirrored in many online interactions (for example, the same conversation quoted in (5) above, but this time on WhatsApp). Similar predictions of context accessibility and mutuality of information also apply to the new medium. Lyons and Tagg (2024) emphasize how interactants in online settings also aim to identify elements of context, including their knowledge and experience that are bound to become relevant to the current situation. These elements are employed in the necessary

offline communication are simply different, favoring “different ways in which they allow us to be present to one another and to be aware of other people’s presence” (Jones 2004: 23); (b) that the relationship between these environments is instead one of complementarity or extension (Bolander and Locher 2020); (c) that there is a *hybridization* between online and offline scenarios (Yus 2011), where the user is a node of (physical, virtual and mostly mixed online-offline) intersecting interactions. In any case, users exhibit a greater *adaptability* compared to face-to-face communication (Heyd and Puschmann 2017: 53). In fact, users tend to overcome the typical bias in online/offline comparisons according to which offline settings are considered to be contextually richer due to the different channels through which information is conveyed (visual, auditory, gestural, etc.) and online settings are considered impoverished and limited (cues-filtered) by the construction of messages often made up solely of plain typed text. This argument has been refuted, given that technological advances have allowed for more complex and comprehensive forms of digital communication through the combination of various modalities (audio, image, text). Even in contexts where written language is primarily used, users compensate for the lack of options for contextualization (Parini 2023: 231; Herring et al. 2013: 7–8; Aakhus and Didomenico 2016: 376).

relationship build-up and/or maintenance and in the construction of common ground (i.e., *mutually manifest* assumptions) upon which further interaction may be sustained.

However, many acts of communication are directed at multiple audiences that are active, participatory co-creators of discourse and are willing to take full responsibility for which inferential direction they follow, often beyond the expected interpretation (if any) of the initial user. As a consequence, a kind of “diluting effect” takes place in terms of which specific “addressee user” the “sender user” might have in mind when creating a new digital discourse, and which contextualization predictions this user holds. Indeed, sometimes users do not know their audiences, and the same discourse – often scattered across various apps and platforms – reaches different types of audiences depending on their capacity to use the necessary contextual information to reach an adequate interpretation.

In this multi-audience environment, users tend to have in mind an *imagined audience* when they engage in online acts of communication. This audience is a mental conceptualization of the people with whom they are communicating, their “audience” and, logically, “people are typically more reliant on the imagined audience during mediated communication, such as letter and email writing or talking on the phone, than in face-to-face settings” (Litt 2012: 331; see also Litt and Hargittai 2016). Unsurprisingly, the user’s *imagined* audience does not often match their *actual* audience, leading to what Marwick and Boyd (2010) called *context collapse*. Take Facebook, for instance. When a user posts some information therein, they often forget that the list of what Facebook generically labels as “friends” includes not only actual close friends, but also acquaintances, colleagues, relatives, ex-students and so on, many of which do not have access to the necessary contextual information to interpret the post correctly, thus leading to unpredictable reactions due to a lack of proper contextualization. When the user is aware of this multiplicity of audiences, a typical strategy is to resort to the so-called *lowest common denominator*, that is, to post only information that the user believes their broadest group of followers will find relevant and non-offensive, and the one that will not entail challenges for contextualization.

While the prototypical act of communication for cognitive pragmatics is verbal and face-to-face, this is not the case for many instances of online communication, where visual and multimodal discourses abound. In different online environments, text and images interact in innovative ways – with images taking new roles in increasingly multimodal configurations – and are not only mutually connected but also scattered across environments such as social media. This shift may problematize pragmatic analyses, because, as Page (2019: 46–47) contends, “the turn towards the visual components of social media communication is difficult for pragmatic scholars to tackle, not least because visual resources are highly varied and cannot be grouped simplistically into one category” (see also Page 2022: 13). Visual discourses such as emojis, stickers, and so-called *graphicons*⁴ likewise combine meanings with text, resulting in interesting pragmatic implications (Hafner 2021: 288).⁵

⁴ This is a higher-order label referring to picture- and text-based graphemes used to represent objects, feelings and ideas in online communications. The list of items covered by the label *graphicon* includes emoticons, emojis, stickers, and animated GIFs, to which Herring (2021) adds memes.

⁵ See, for example, Yus (2025) for emoji-text relationships and Linares-Bernabéu and Yus (forthcoming) for the pragmatic functions of stickers in everyday messaging interactions.

Furthermore, there is a lack of visible discourse boundaries (many online discourses are presented as nodes distributed on the screen and across screens) and many discourses are produced and inferred online but they are created offline, with a mixture of physical-virtual contexts (e.g., selfies, image tagging, etc.), which entails challenges and implications for pragmatics. Bolander (2019) showcases the fact that an individual's communicative possibilities typically include the options offered by online and offline technologies, both of which need to be considered (Aakhus and Didomenico 2016: 383). Similarly, as Lyons and Tagg (2024) remark, mobile phone technology allows users to take and share photos, which leads interlocutors to feel that they are provided with a window through which they can peep into the users' physical contexts, share their perspective on a situation through proximity, gaze and frame, as well as feel involved in the experience. Hashtag-mediated tagging likewise performs several functions, among which one stands out: to mark the image thematically so that it gets indexed and is more easily searchable, as occurs on Instagram through the massive use of hashtags to tag photos.⁶

Given the different modes that abound online (text, image, audio, multimodal discourses...), the most interesting mode combination for cognitive and internet pragmatics is the situation where images are not mere colorful additions to the verbal discourse but force new or alternative interpretations of the accompanying text. An example is memes (see Yus 2019, 2023b). Consider the following text-image combinations in the following memes (9–10):

- (9) Top text: He must be famous.
Image: Picture of a man in a cart carrying dozens of fans.
Bottom text: He has so many fans.
- (10) Text: Two feet of snow in New York!
Image: A New York street where two big feet have been made of snow.

The creators of these memes predict that the picture is the mode that will initially draw users' interest as the most prominent and attention-arousing part of the meme, as demonstrated in laboratory analyses (e.g., Simarro et al. 2021). The image is not meant to be a mere ornament but serves some strategic communicative purpose. The information initially inferred from these pictures impacts on the processing of the adjacent text(s) in these memes, generating alternative (and initially non-relevant) meanings for some word or phrase. They may even generate parallel alternatives that must be considered while interpreting these memes, often at the expense of an initially accessible and relevant interpretation, and all that with the ultimate intention to generate humorous effects. In (9), the presence of "famous" in the top text facilitates the disambiguation of *fans* in the bottom text as "one's followers," where the user may be satisfied with this relevant interpretation and thus unaware of other possible meanings of the word. However, the picture of the man

⁶ Another clear example is *locative media*, which have brought about a merging of physical places and the virtual information attached to them, together with an emphasis on the user's location, as happens with food pics (Yus forthcoming b), where the user's physical location (e.g., a restaurant) intertwines with the information posted online by the user (photo) and comments or reactions by their audience. In a certain sense, physical spaces regain the importance they had lost with the advent of first-generation mobile phones. This overlay of physical and virtual information is something which analysts are now trying to come to terms with (Yus 2021: 77).

in the cart carrying many fans forces the consideration of another meaning of the word, namely “an apparatus for cooling or ventilation”. Similarly, in (10) the picture of two large feet made of snow makes one of the meanings of feet (part of the body) as accessible and relevant as the normal interpretation of the word (at least in the expression “feet of snow”) as a unit of measurement. This role of image in multimodal discourses is particularly interesting for pragmatics (see Yus 2023b; forthcoming a).

A very interesting link between the default and the online-specific cognitive pragmatics approaches to interpretation concerns the proposal of correlations between verbal explicatures/implicatures and their visual counterparts. Explicatures are explicit interpretations obtained from enriching words through inferential processes. By contrast, implicatures are fully context-dependent and cannot be obtained from the words themselves but are derived with the aid of context. Yus (2025) provides the example in (11). Ann’s utterance must be enriched inferentially by Sue beyond the literal meaning of her words.⁷ The resulting explicit interpretation or *explicature* of Ann’s utterance would roughly be like (12). However, this is not the actual answer to Sue’s question, and she is therefore expected to link (11) to contextual information such as (13) to yield the implicated conclusion or *implicature* in (14).

- (11) Sue: Did Mary like the party?
Ann: Mary? She arrived really, really late. And instead of thanking me for inviting her, she started complaining that the party was hell, that there was nobody there and no drink.
- (12) Mary arrived long after 22:00. And instead of thanking Ann for inviting Mary, she started complaining that the party was horrible, that there were very few people there and no alcoholic drink.
- (13) Someone who calls a party “hell” and complains of lack of people and alcoholic drink at the party cannot possibly like that party.
- (14) Mary did not like the party she went to.

This inferential pattern for explicit and implicated interpretations is also at work in online communication, but many digital discourses are not strictly verbal and often include visual elements or are devoid of text. This is why in previous research (e.g., Yus 2022, 2023b, 2025) a similar terminology has been put forward for image-based communication: *visual explicatures* and *visual implicatures* as parallels to their verbal counterparts. Consider the messaging conversations in (15) and (16):

- (15) Ann: Hi Susan! How are you?
Susan: Hi, Ann! I am fine!
Ann: I am back in Alicante after several months abroad. I wanted to meet you, but I was told you are away...

⁷ Specifically, Sue has to select “Mary” and “the party” as the referents of *she* and *there*, respectively; also specify the domain of the adverb *late* by using her knowledge of when exactly the party supposedly started; to adjust the metaphorical *hell* into the quality of what the party was like, e.g., “horrible”; to specify that *nobody* actually means “very few people”; to recover unspoken elements (“nobody [I knew]”); and finally, to narrow the concept associated with *drink* to a more specific and relevant “alcoholic drink”.

- Susan: [Susan sends Ann a photo of herself hiking in Ireland].
 Susan: Rings a bell?
 Ann: Ireland! Isn't it? I've been hiking there! Enjoy your trip!
 Susan: Thanks! I'll be back on Monday
 Ann: See you next week, I hope!
 (16) Ann: Hi Susan, will you be at your office tomorrow? I need to discuss with you some ideas for that article I told you about...
 Susan: [Susan sends Ann a photo of herself hiking in Ireland].
 Ann: I see... Where are you? Obviously not in Alicante...
 Susan: Hiking in Ireland, back on Monday
 Ann: Ok. See you next week

The photo of Susan in (15) is intended to provide explicit information about her whereabouts. The picture roughly communicates that “Susan is currently hiking in Ireland” which may well be referred to as a *visual explicature*. By contrast, despite using the same photo to show Ann where she is in (16) (visual explicature), this time Susan *also* aims to communicate that she will not be at her office tomorrow (a *visual implicature*) as an answer to Ann's question. As happens with verbal explicatures, Ann uses the information provided by the image as part of the context that is necessary to derive the visual implicature.

Similarly, in Yus (2025), the same terminology is applied to emojis. Consider the messaging conversations in (17/19). In the conversation in (17), Lily expects Sara to use her emoji as input to inferentially construct the explicit interpretation (visual explicature) in (18): “It's sunny where Lily lives”. However, the same emoji is used with a different intention in conversation (19): Lily similarly expects Sara to infer (18) from the emoji (now rewritten as (20b)) but this time she *also* expects Sara to be able to retrieve assumptions such as (20a/c) from context and to derive the visual implicatures in (21).

- (17) Sara: It is pouring down in Alicante! What's the weather like there?
 Lily: ☀️
 (18) It's sunny where Lily lives.
 (19) Sara: Shall we go shopping this morning?
 Lily: ☀️
 (20) a. Today is Saturday.
 b. Today is sunny where Lily lives.
 c. Lily goes jogging on Saturday mornings if the weather is fine.
 (21) Lily is going jogging this morning.
 Lily does not want to go shopping with me this morning.

In examples like these, explicit and implicated interpretations – which in cognitive pragmatics are typically associated with verbal communication – are applied to images and emojis. As such, they constitute an interesting example of how the shift from cognitive pragmatics to internet pragmatics does not necessarily entail a different methodology and terminology simply because the discourse analyzed is not the prototypical object of pragmatic analysis, namely verbal communication.

3.2. Multiplicity and choice of interpretations

In the prototypical act of offline communication, utterances have multiple possible interpretations ranked according to their accessibility. In such a scenario, context plays a major role in making a certain interpretation more relevant and likely to be the one intended by the speaker. In this circumstance where certain interpretations are favored above others, the information already inferred from preceding utterances or stretches of text also becomes part of the context that influences how subsequent utterances are inferred. Typically, then, in face-to-face interactions there is an intended linear progression in the interpretation of utterances.

By contrast – although this also applies to online communication, especially in certain settings such as messaging or video chats – there are many online communicative situations in which this linear progression does not hold. In many internet discourses, while the initial user's uploaded content may propose an expected interpretive path, it is more common for other users to decide which path they take. A clear case is hyperlinked discourses, where the audience takes full responsibility for which link to click on and how to connect the different chunks of discourse together to reach a coherent interpretation (Yus 2011). Moreover, in many of today's online discourses, there is no prototypical (i.e., strictly relevant) interpretation because parts of the discourse are scattered on the Net; these may be relevant to the user even if there is a lack of accessibility to all the other chunks. An example is transmedia narratives which, as described in Yus (2022: 126), typically unfold through different media, accessed through different platforms, apps, and devices, with each medium contributing its own informational value to the relevance of the narrative as a whole. Furthermore, narrative expansions are often generated by the audience in a participatory and collaborative fashion.⁸

Therefore, the cognitive pragmatics view of a set of possible relevant interpretations, both intended by the speaker and inferred by the hearer, is complemented by other possibilities in digital discourses. In many of these there is no prediction of what information will be more relevant to the actual addressee or even what the exact (i.e., intended) interpretation might be. In reality, it all depends on the context of interpretation, unique in every situation for each user. Different audiences with different backgrounds and context accessibility will deliver radically different interpretations of the same digital discourse (e.g., within the aforementioned "context collapse"), many of them acceptable and others clearly beyond the interpretation that the user had in mind (if any).

3.3. Context prediction and accessibility

Previous sections emphasized that background knowledge is important for directing the addressee's inferences towards a specific direction. That was the case of Frank's knowledge of John's personal situation, which aided him in understanding his

⁸ A good example is the TV series *Skam*, which was broadcast on a website through short video clips that unfolded in real time and were released at irregular times. At the end of each week, the clips were brought together to form complete episodes with varying length, which were published on the show's website and also broadcast on TV and on-demand services. Besides video clips, the website included photos, SMSs, and email conversations between the characters. Instagram accounts were created for the characters, and in a later season, YouTube was also integrated. These forms of media were independent but also contributed to the narrative as a whole.

utterance in (5) above. What about the inferences of online information? Again, the importance of background information for helping the addressee select the most relevant interpretation applies. However, context accessibility can be problematic in online communication. As Hafner (2021: 287) remarks, context accessibility is complicated in online interactions, especially when conversational participants lack common coordinates in time and space. Indeed, the affordances of digital interfaces complicate typical asynchronous interactions by making immediate, synchronous interaction possible through digital devices.

Interface design and affordances clearly impact on the quality and quantity of online interactions, as well as users' capacity to contextualize messages and publications (i.e., posts), one of the major claims of *cyberpragmatics* (Yus 2011, 2022, 2025). Social media interactions take place through interfaces, whose design offers users different options for contextualization, ranging from the limited cues-filtered text-based messaging to richer media such as video-mediated interactions such as Meet or Zoom (Yus 2018, 2019, 2024; Hafner 2021: 282; Forceville and Sánchez-Querubín 2022: 326).

Moreover, on many occasions there is not a single sender user, since discourses are multi-authored. An example is Wikipedia, where "the content and text are more or less in a constant state of flux, being edited, enhanced, and updated whenever a user sees fit" (Scott 2022: 31). Therefore, the author's presence in the discourse is weaker and less visible than in prototypical face-to-face situations, as studied by cognitive pragmatics. In fact, authors online sometimes mesh with their readers and commenters creating a unified single discourse (e.g., on social media, where comments become hybridized and imbricated with the initial entry and are perceived as a combined, single discursive entity).

An extreme situation is virtual worlds, where users have a very partial idea of the user behind an avatar, often with radical differences between the user and the chosen avatar. Besides, and despite a tendency nowadays towards online-offline congruity (e.g., on social media), anonymity is still the norm in certain interactions carried out online (e.g., through the use of nicknames on dating apps), which further complicates accessibility to the necessary contextual background information that aids in the selection of relevant interpretations (Scott 2022: 29).

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The present study has commented on some of the challenges and necessary adjustments that online communication requires as compared to face-to-face interactions. Cognitive pragmatics and specifically relevance theory envisage prototypical scenarios and analyses to explain communication that mostly takes place face-to-face, between known interlocutors that share contextual assumptions. When shifting from cognitive pragmatics to internet pragmatics, several considerations, adjustments, and re-arrangements must be applied to each phase of the prototypical act of communication as predicted by cognitive pragmatics. These new considerations include the multiplicity of audiences, the varied discursive modes beyond default verbal utterances, and the role of interfaces in contextualization and in the choice of a relevant interpretation.

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