Cognitive-pragmatic explanations of socio-pragmatic phenomena: the case of genre

Christoph Unger, SIL International

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1. Introduction

For the purposes of this paper, I will start with two definitions:

Socio-pragmatics: the study of how social information enters into communicative behaviour.
Cognitive pragmatics: the study of how the inferential processes in comprehension work.

A comprehensive pragmatic theory will certainly have to address both these issues. In the search for such a comprehensive view of pragmatics a question immediately arises: how are socio-pragmatics and cognitive pragmatics related? One answer given in the literature is that the two domains are separate and socio-pragmatics controls cognitive pragmatics in the sense that socio-pragmatic entities are said to provide deeper explanations for phenomena that cognitive pragmatics can't. This answer is often given in the literature on genre (e.g. Kitis 1999; Holdcroft 1979; Green 1995; Goatly 1994; Paltridge 1995; Bex 1992).

Another answer which is suggested in some strands of the literature is that socio-pragmatic phenomena can indeed be accounted for within cognitive pragmatics, so that the two domains need not be seen as separate (Jary 1998; Zegarac & Clark 1999).

In this paper I want to discuss the relation between socio-pragmatics and cognitive pragmatics with particular reference to genre. I will argue that genre is best accounted for in relevance-theoretic terms as providing access to information which helps to

fine-tune the addressee's expectations of relevance. This means that the contribution which genre makes to comprehension falls squarely within the relevance-driven comprehension procedure and thus within the domain of cognitive pragmatics, so that the socio-pragmatic phenomenon of genre finds a genuine explanation in cognitive pragmatic terms. I will then point out that this relevance-theoretic account of genre extends naturally to other related socio-pragmatic phenomena. This suggests that a stronger claim may even be made: cognitive pragmatics is related to socio-pragmatics in such a way that socio-pragmatic phenomena receive truly cognitive explanations.

This argument will be developed as follows: section 2 discusses the socio-pragmatic nature of genre. In section 3 I will discuss accounts of genre which place genre recognition outside the scope of the principles governing communication. Section 4 is devoted to my alternative account of genre in relevance theory. In section 5 I extend this account of genre to related phenomena, i.e. register and culturally determined differences in ways of speaking.

2. Genre as a socio-cultural phenomenon

There is a common consensus that genre is essentially a social/cultural phenomenon (see e.g. Eggins & Martin 1997 and references therein; Kitis 1999; Swales 1990; Paltridge 1995), or in our terms: a socio-pragmatic phenomenon. But what is a socio-pragmatic phenomenon? An immediate answer could be that it is a set of assumptions shared by a people group which governs the communicative behaviour of members of this group. It could be added that a socio-pragmatic phenomenon also relates communicative behaviour to the structure of cultural institutions. Eggins & Martin (1997:239-241) point to the example of market transaction or service encounters, where the structure of the social interaction is reflected in the structure of the communications involved.

Genre certainly fulfils these characteristics:

-genre is culture specific. Example: Epic prose such as in Homer's *Odyssey* lacking in English.
-genre regulate how to express one's intentions e.g. in business letters, recommendations etc.
-absence of genre knowledge can cause problems for comprehension. See example (8) which will be discussed later.

Thus, genre consists of information shared in a group of people, which furthermore relates communicative behaviour to the structure of cultural institutions. The question arises: how do such socio-pragmatic phenomena exert this influence on communicative behaviour? How do they influence the inferential comprehension procedure whose explanation is the domain of cognitive pragmatics?

One answer is that the maxims or principles which govern the inferential phase of utterance interpretation are influenced by these social entities. The cognitive comprehension procedure cannot be completely governed by cognitive principles but must interact with mechanisms of social cognition. Applied to genre this means that genre information is claimed to influence the specific content of the maxims or principles which govern the addressee's inferential recognition of the speaker's intentions. Thus, genre recognition falls outside the domain of cognitive pragmatics but interacts with it in subtle ways. (Kitis 1999; Holdcroft 1979; Green 1995) This is illustrated in figure 1:

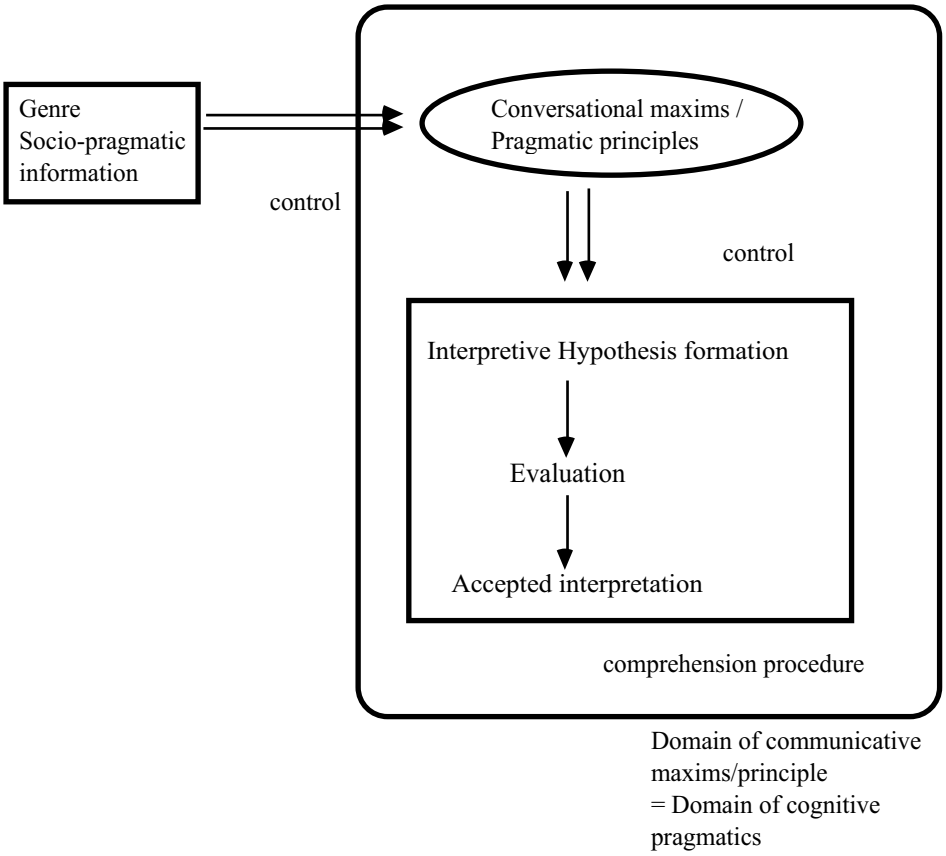
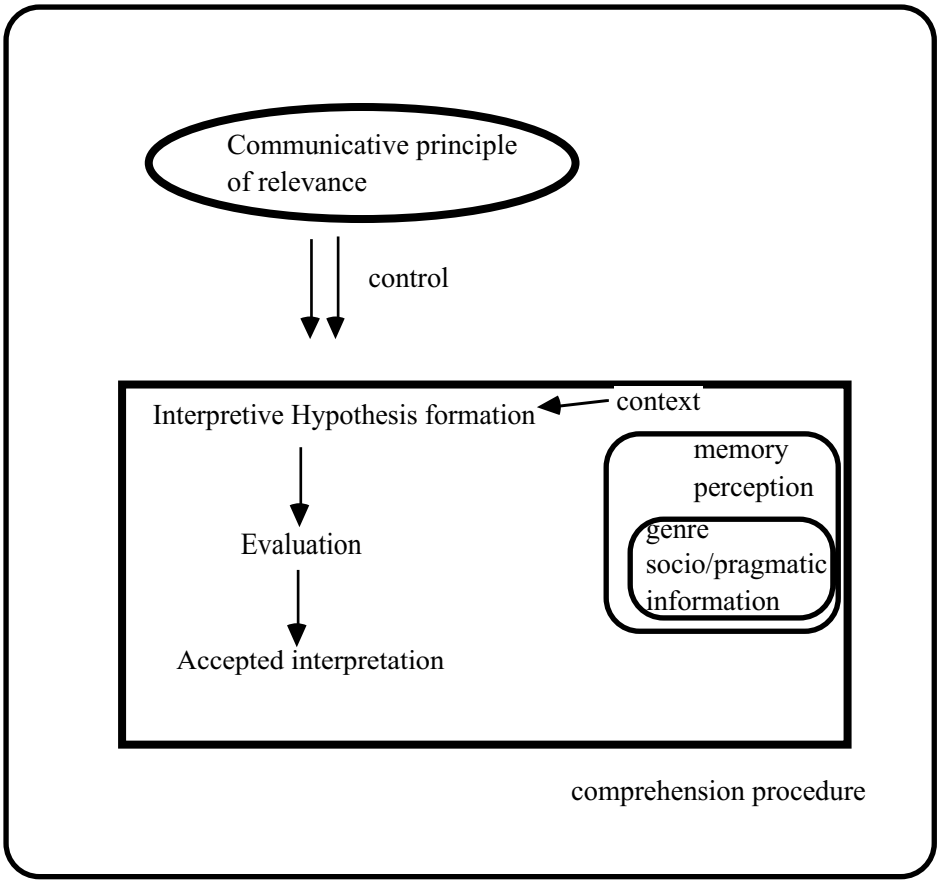


Figure 1

Another answer may be that socio-pragmatic information is of a kind which feeds naturally into the cognitive mechanisms underlying comprehension. The comprehension procedure is governed by cognitive principles even when socio-pragmatic information (e.g. genre) plays a role. Such information enters into the cognitive comprehension procedure by providing contextual assumptions for the inference processes rather than information for adjusting the principles governing this process, and falls squarely into the domain of cognitive pragmatics. (Unger 2001a) This is illustrated in figure 2:



Domain of pragmatic principle(s)
=Domain of cognitive pragmatics

Figure 2

In the following section I will examine the first mentioned view in more detail.

3. Genre and conversational maxims

Grice (1975; 1989) argued that communication is regulated by a Cooperative Principle which is further spelled out by more specific maxims of Quantity, Quality, Manner and Relation:

> *Cooperative Principle*
> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose of direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.

Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relation

Be relevant.

Manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

(Grice 1989, 26-27)

Holdcroft (1979) was among the first to point out that the Cooperative Principle (and hence by implication the other maxims) may not be operative in the stated form in all discourse types. In highly constrained discourses, for example, where the participants have unequal participation rights (e.g. in cross-examinations, interrogations and interviews), the participants do not obviously cooperate in the usual sense of the term. Holdcroft suggested a more abstract formulation of the Cooperative Principle which can be made specific in different ways in different discourse types.

> Make your contribution to the discourse such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the purposes you have in entering into, or which you have accepted as the purposes of, or which are the generally accepted purposes of, the discourse in which you are a participant. (Holdcroft 1979, 139)

Kitis (1999) expands on this suggestion. However, she takes the overarching principle of conversation to be Relevance rather than Cooperation, where she takes Relevance to be a social parameter governing expectations about how the conversation or talk

exchange will proceed. These expectations are in turn related to the type of social event in which the communication act occurs, so that Kitis' supermaxim of Global Relevance could be paraphrased as *be relevant to the goal or purpose of the present social event type.* (Unger 2001, 266).

Social events are mentally represented by means of frames or scripts (Kitis 1999, 650). These scripts, contain information about typical goals or purposes of the respective events. These typical goals define the discourse type appropriate for the social event. The discourse type in turn specifies which maxims are operative in it, and how they differ in relative importance: 'Global Relevance relates first the discourse type to the social event (or domain) and only then are (aspects of) other maxims made contingent.' (p. 652) In this theory, the precise instantiation of the conversational supermaxim is different in different discourse types, and moreover different sets of maxims are operative in each discourse type. Understanding the intentions of the speaker thus depends on a recognition of the discourse type involved, since otherwise the maxims for utterance interpretation were lacking.

Green (1995) turns to discourse type considerations in accounting for the distribution of scalar implicatures. The idea is that the current goals and plans of the interlocutors influence what inferences are licensed by the (quantity) maxims. Different types of exchanges may have different plans and goals. In some cases, of course, the quantity maxims might interact in a way that leads to the generation of scalar implicatures. This is not so in others, and in these cases scalar implicatures will not be entertained. In other words: different discourse types regulate indirectly how the conversational maxims interact to generate implicatures, by specifying the nature of communicative cooperation with respect to the requirements of the current talk exchange. (Unger 2001:269.) While on this account Grice's Cooperative Principle and maxims are in force as originally formulated, the specific force of the Cooperative Principle is seen as influenced by genre.

Even though there are clear difference in the accounts of Holdcroft, Kitis and Green, they do share the following architectural feature: a process of genre recognition must precede the regular comprehension procedure because the genre determines the specifics of the maxims or principles operative in this comprehension act. Genre and other socio-pragmatic information is assigned a special place in communication, outside the realm of cognitive pragmatics proper.

It is Holdcroft himself who pointed to a serious problem of accounts with this property:

> The claim that acceptance of [the Cooperative Principle] and of its generalized version can involve the acceptance of different sets of maxims in different discourse-types, and even within different discourses of the same type carried on with rather different ends in view, is plausible, but frustrating. (Holdcroft (979, 141)

What leads to this frustration is the following: if different maxims can operate on different texts of the same type, then genre recognition does not provide a reliable source for determining which interpretation of the communication maxims is to be used. All explanation for utterance interpretation is then lost, both for discourses following the standard type and for ones that deviate from it.

To illustrate this problem, consider two examples from Green (1995) of the same genre, inquiry, which nevertheless lead to different effects with regard to scalar implicatures:

(1) Suppose first of all that the hearer H has asked S, "How many children does Nigel have?," that H is to be understood as wanting an answer in terms of an integer (rather than an answer of the form 'between n and m children'), and that no one has subsequently rejected the question or changed the subject. The speakers are therewith engaged in an inquiry, and hence being as informative as is required involves giving a complete answer to the question that drives the inquiry if they can. In such a case, if S does not make a stronger claim than that Nigel has fourteen children (such as that Nigel has fifteen children), then the auditor may

> infer that S takes himself to be in no position to do so, and thus that S knows that the stronger claim does not hold, or at least that S does not know that the stronger claim holds. (Green 1995, 107)

Green's next example is also a case of inquiry, but no scalar implicature results from a weaker statement in this case:

> (2) Suppose on the other hand that S and H are jointly inquiring into the question whether every adult male in the Shifflett clan has at least fourteen children. Here once again the speakers are engaged in an inquiry, but one that is driven by a different question from the one that drove the conversation in our last case. In response to the question whether every adult male in the Shifflett clan has at least fourteen children S may say, "Nigel has fourteen children, and so does Jed and so does Uriah." The claim that Nigel has fifteen children is conversationally relevant, since it straightforwardly implies that Nigel has fourteen. Yet from the fact that S does not make this stronger claim we cannot infer that he does not take himself to be in a position to do so. (Green 1995, 108)

Thus the conversation type (characterized by the aim of the interlocutors) alone does not determines the current requirements of the talk exchange, but other factors also come into play.

Kitis (1999, 658) suggests that given an adequate discourse typology which is properly based on social domains these problems will disappear. However, she also contends that no discourse typology could cover every discourse:

> One … must be aware that this approach offers only an initial and rather limited navigational orientation as events are not fully, or even correctly, represented in fossilized, static, abstracted, generalized and socially normalized models, but are also dynamically adapted to individualized cognitive interfaces … (Kitis 1999, 663)

But if every discourse can in principle follow 'individualized cognitive interfaces' then Holdcroft's problem is obviously not remedied. I conclude that accounts of genre which make the cognitive pragmatic comprehension procedure contingent on

genre recognition as a separate process suffer from serious defects.

4. Genre and relevance-guided comprehension processes

According to relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995), utterance interpretation is based upon the tendency of human cognition to allocate processing resources to that information which promises to maximize cognitive efficiency: to gain the greatest (positive) cognitive effects for the least processing effort. This tendency is called *the cognitive principle of relevance.* Since ostensive communication claims the addressee's attention and thereby demands the investment of processing effort, the cognitive principle of relevance predicts that a communicator can hope for successful communication only if the stimulus chosen claims to be at least relevant enough for the addressee to be worth the processing effort involved. Moreover, since human cognition tends to maximize relevance, it is in the communicator's interests that the level of relevance of the stimulus for the addressee is more than mere adequacy. Thus, ostensive communication is characterized by a *communicative principle of relevance:*

> Every act of ostensive communication conveys the presumption that it is at least relevant enough to be worth the addressee's attention and that it is also the most relevant one the communicator could have made given her abilities and preferences. (Adapted from Sperber & Wilson 1995)

This presumption is a member of the set of assumptions communicated by an ostensive stimulus. It is a claim that calls for verification: is the stimulus indeed as relevant as presumed? It is furthermore a general claim that licenses the addressee to expect a certain level of relevance. These expectations relate more specifically to the stimulus in question and are therefore more specific than the presumption of relevance on which they are based. Since the most relevant stimulus is one that minimizes processing effort (by the definition of the cognitive concept of relevance), the most obvious procedure for testing the presumption of optimal relevance would be to access the most easily accessible interpretation testing whether the level of relevance achieved

by this satisfies the addressee's expectations of relevance. If not, the next easily accessible interpretation is tested, and so on following a path of least effort. The first interpretation which satisfies the addressee's expectations of relevance is the one intended by the communicator.

To illustrate this relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure, consider the following example:

(3) A: Did you have a good trip?
B: We were caught in a traffic jam near Mainz.
(Unger 2001a, 142 example (9))

B's utterance is an indirect answer to A's question. Indirect answers typically raise quite specific expectations of the relevance of the response which can be satisfied through the recovery of a small number of strongly communicated implicatures (Sperber & Wilson 1995, 194-195). The following table presents a relevance-theoretic analysis of this example. The left-hand column paraphrases the mental representations entertained by A in the course of the interpretation process. The right-hand column comments on the source and status of these representations:

(4) (Unger 2001a, 142)

(a) B has said "We were caught in a traffic jam near Mainz."	*Decoding of B's utterance.*
(b) Information about whether B had a good trip would be relevant to A.	*Assumption made mutually manifest by A's utterance.*
(c) B's utterance will be optimally relevant to A.	*Presumption of optimal relevance, communicated on the basis of the communicative principle of relevance.*
(d) B's utterance will be optimally relevant to A by providing information as to whether B had a good trip.	*Expectation of relevance created by A's adopting the presumption of optimal relevance and enriching it in the light of the mutual cognitive environment.*
(e) B and his passengers were caught in a traffic jam near Mainz on the occasion of the trip in question.	*Development of the logical form of B's utterance. Accepted as the explicature of this utterance.*
(f) Being caught in a traffic jam is an unpleasant experience.	*Encyclopaedic information. Accepted as an implicated premise.*
(g) If one had an unpleasant experience on the road, one did not have a good trip.	*Encyclopaedic information. Accepted as an implicated premise.*
(h) B had an unpleasant experience on the road.	*Follows from the explicature of B's utterance and (f).Implicated conclusion.*
(i) B did not have a good trip.	*Conclusion from (g) and (h) which satisfies the expectation of relevance (d) raised by B's utterance. Accepted as an implicated conclusion.*

The assumption in (4b) is highly accessible. It gives details about the kind of information which A would find relevant if true. It is easy for A to combine this assumption with (c4) (which is the presumption of optimal relevance communicated by the utterance on principle) and form the belief in (4d), which amounts to a specific expectation of relevance. The inference process illustrated in (4e-i) provides cognitive effects of the expected kind and hence validate the presumption of relevance.

The sequence of presentation of the inference processes in this table does not imply

serial succession of these processes. On the contrary, relevance theory claims that content, context and cognitive effects are adjusted in parallel (Sperber & Wilson 1998). There are of course inferences which logically depend on a previous one, and this constrains the extent of the parallel processing somewhat.

Expectations of relevance can be quite specific about the content and/or level of relevance. They can also be more specific in another respect. Consider the following examples:

(5) Mike to Sally: What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages for us to move to Berlin?

Whatever Sally's answer might be, Mike will expect that it won't consist of just one simple utterance. Rather, he expects that Sally will produce a complex stimulus consisting of various utterances that will achieve relevance as a unit. Similar in the following example:

(6) a master may explain to his apprentice how to exchange the shock absorbers of a car, doing the action as he speaks. (Unger 2001a)

In this case, likewise, the addressee expects a complex stimulus which extends over time and consists of sequences of utterances as well as of simultaneous non-linguistic actions.

The point of these examples is that complex stimuli raise expectations about their complexity, i.e. about how they will unfold over time. Texts/discourses can be regarded as complex stimuli in this sense, that is, as a unit of communicative behaviour and not a linguistic one.

We have seen in example (3) that highly accessible contextual information can be accessed early in the interpretation process to fine-tune expectations of relevance. Unger (2001) argues that genre information, too, can be easily accessed for fine-tuning expectations of relevance in complex stimuli. To explain this, we must consider

Sperber's (1996) account of culture in terms of an epidemiology of representations.

Cultural knowledge is a pool of mental representations widely distributed in a group. Often, these representations are quite stable within the group in the sense of being shared and transmitted over several generations. What makes a mental representation into one that is successful in this way? The answer has to do with the human tendency to pay attention to the most relevant information (in the technical sense). If (a set of) representation(s) is useful for establishing the relevance of an input, it is itself strengthened and becomes easier for subsequent access. This in turn means that these representations are more readily accessed for processing further input. The more a (set of) representation(s) is productive in cognitive processing of inputs in this way, the more beneficial it will be for the individuals of this group to make sure others share these assumptions. The most effective way to do this is to communicate them. This in turn increases the accessibility of these assumptions. Thus, cultural knowledge is information which is relatively easy to access on the grounds of the role it plays in the search for relevance.

Recall now the relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure again. The first step is for the hearer to adopt particular expectations of relevance. In the analysis of example (3) in (4) we saw that highly accessible information can be used in this step. Genre is cultural knowledge. We have just seen that cultural knowledge is typically highly accessible. Hence it can be expected that this kind of information can be used for fine-tuning of expectations of relevance.

Finally, let us consider in more detail the ways in which genre information may fine-tune expectations of relevance of complex stimuli. Recall that expectations can be rather general in that they relate just to the level of cognitive effects, or they can be more specific, relating to the type of effects to be expected. In the case of complex stimuli, expectations of relevance can also provide specific expectations as to how the text will unfold.

Now let us look at some particular genres:

(7) Seminar motion to establish a working group for research in translation

Whereas, the SIL International Translation Department sponsored a Relevance Theory Update Seminar at Horsleys Green in November 2000,

And whereas, the participants unanimously expressed a desire for the development of an ongoing Working Group for Cross-Disciplinary Research in Translation,

And whereas, ongoing formal investigation and development of translation theory is an imperative for SIL,

And whereas, the Translation Department has expressed a desire to assume corporate leadership for this venture,

MOVED to request the Academic Services Division of SIL Academic Affairs to endorse the genesis of this group, and to support its development through the Translation Department.

Moved: NN
Seconded: NN
Unanimously carried: (all participants present).

(Unger 2001b; used by permission of the Int. Translation Department of SIL International)

This is an example of the motion genre. Here, the genre raises very specific expectations as to what utterances will be used when: *whereas…moved to…moved by.* This is a case of a highly conventionalized genre. Similar ones are business letters, legal contracts (Klinge 1998) or letters of recommendation of an employer for an employee in German. In the latter case an elaborate system of conventional expression has developed.

Some genre may be a little less detailed in the expectations they raise. Instead of raising expectation about utterances or words to use in a particular sequence with a particular meaning, the expectations may be regarding the sort of thing to be expected. In a linguistic article, for example, the expectations will be that one finds an abstract, an introduction, the main argument, a conclusion and a bibliography. Other examples

of genres where the expectations about the unfolding of the text may be more or less precise in this sense include sonnets, short stories, weather forecasts, news bulletins, and advertisements (Unger 2001a, 295).

Yet another way in which genre may contribute expectations of relevance is exemplified in (8):

(8) Isaiah 5:1-7 (Working translation of Unger (2001a); The Hebrew text with interlinear glosses is presented in the appendix.)

> (1a) I will sing to my friend/lover a song of my friend to his vineyard. (1b) My friend had a vineyard on a fruitful hilltop (2a) and he digged it up and removed its stones and planted the best species of grapes in it (2b) and he built a tower in its midst, and also a winevat he hewed into it. (2c) And he waited for the vineyard to bring good grapes, but it brought wild (bitter) ones. (3) And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. (4a) What else was there to do for my vineyard which I haven't done, (4b) why did I expect good grapes and it brought forth sour ones? (5a) And now I will let you know what I will do to my vineyard. (5b) I will remove its hedge and it will become firewood. (5c) I will tear down its walls and it will become a trampled land. (6a) I will bring about its peril, it will not be pruned and not be hewn, and in it shall grow thorns and thornbushes. (6b) And I will command the clouds to not let rain fall on it (or: …the clouds to refrain from letting it rain over it) (7) For the house Israel is the vineyard of the Lord of hosts, and the people of Judah are the planting of his delight, and he waited for justice, but there was only injustice (or bloodshed), for righteousness, but there were only cries.

To understand this text it is crucial to recognize that it is an instance of the Hebrew love-song genre. This genre makes use of typical symbols (or allegories): *orchard* or *vineyard* typically symbolizes the female partner, the gardener or owner of the vineyard or orchard the male partner, and the vineyard-owner's action of toiling and caring for the vineyard is a symbol for the male partners' expressions of love to his partner. This genre information has important consequences for comprehension. Among these are the following: the assumption that the text is going to be a love-song causes the reader to assign the reference of the first person singular in (5:1a) to a fictitious

female speaker rather than the prophet Isaiah. Also, the reader is encouraged to seek the relevance of the text in analogies between what is said about the vineyard and a human love relationship. These analogies will allow the reader to appreciate the emotional impact of the text. (A detailed analysis of this text along these lines is given in Unger 2001a:pp.) In other words: genre information for Hebrew love songs gives the addressee clues as to which cognitive effects certain symbolic expressions will have, i.e. how to interpret them. The expectations are not about form but about content.

On this account, genre information enters the comprehension procedure as integral part of the parallel adjustment of context, content and contextual implications which is governed by the communicative principle of relevance. The socio-pragmatic phenomenon of genre receives an explanation in cognitive pragmatic terms. This architecture is different from the approaches discussed in the previous section and does not share their problems.

Another point that should be noticed about this relevance-theoretic account of genre is that it motivates the existence of genre: since communication is driven by the search for optimal relevance, communicators do well to rely on contextual assumptions which help the addressee to adjust their expectations of relevance of complex stimuli. By the same token, it is advantageous that genre concepts should emerge.

Lastly, I should point out that it doesn't have to be genre information that contributes to the fine-tuning of expectations of relevance, as was seen in (4). Indeed, genre does not always enter into comprehension. Also, expectation of relevance are constantly adjusted over time during the on-line processing of discourse. In this process, genre information may give way to other assumptions for this purpose. We can see for example in example () that the text in later parts talk about divorce rather than love, and that the vineyard- and vineyard owner symbolism come to carry a different meaning than in the beginning. Genre is not a straight-jacket for discourse fixed once

for the whole unit.

5. Beyond genre: extending the relevance-theoretic account of genre to other socio-pragmatic phenomena

The above relevance-theoretic account of genre was based on the idea that genre information is typically easily accessible contextual information by virtue of its epidemiological distribution in a people group. Notice that cultural information other than genre information has this property as well. Hence it can be expected that cultural information other than genre information can be used for fine-tuning expectations of relevance as well. In this section I want to discuss two such cases: register and cultural preferences of expression.

5. 1 Register

The concept of register was introduced to describe variations in linguistic expression conditioned by the social setting of the communicative act. For example, in a lecture about pragmatic theory I may use the term "ostensive-inferential communication." In a conversation about the same topic, on the other hand, I may prefer to use the expression "communication by obviously intentional behaviour" instead, the latter being more in line with everyday vocabulary. The idea of the notion of register is that in the *field* "technical communication", the *mode* "prepared oral communication with limited audience feedback" and the *tenor* "technically precise expression preferred", technical terms (such as "ostensive-inferential") are more readily expected then in conversations about the same topic (which could classified as *field* "technical communication", *mode* "spontaneous oral communication with feedback" and *tenor* "down-to-earth explanation"), and vice versa. In other words: the linguistic choices available to the communicator and expected by the addressee are narrowed down in different social settings in different ways.

Register is seen as differing from genre in the following ways: register specifies a range of linguistic choices (the available "repertoire") which are preferred in the given communicative setting. Genre, on the other hand, specifies expectations about discourse organization: the schematic structure. (In the relevance-theoretic account, genre can also specify expectations about content or interpretive richness of texts, see above.)

In relevance-theoretic terms, register can easily be account for as providing information about the communicator's preferences. Such information may be associated with a cultural concept which is not specific to a certain type of communication. Thus, the information "the communicator has a preference for using technical vocabulary" can be stored as an encyclopaedic entry in the concept ACADEMIC ENDEAVOUR.

In this way, register information is easily accessible for fine-tuning expectations of relevance in the same way as explained for genre. The way in which register and genre enter into comprehension are the same. This sheds light on the intuition that register and genre are closely related concepts. The differences between register and genre are purely descriptive: register information is about communicator's preferences and may be stored under general cultural concepts, whereas genre information is about all kinds of expectations of relevance in complex stimuli and presumably stored under genre concepts. This sheds light on the difficulty in distinguishing between the two, as evidenced in the literature. From the perspective of explaining communication (i.e. that of pragmatic theory), the difference does not matter. It may matter for ethnomethodological (socio-pragmatic) description, though.

5. 2 Cultural preferences of expression

An other socio-pragmatic phenomenon can be found in culturally defined preferences of expression. An example of this can be the differences in the usage of preparatory questions in Behdînî-Kurdish on the one hand, and in English and German on the

other (Unger 1994). In Behdînî-Kurdish, preparatory questions such as in (9) are used to a much greater extent than in German or English:

(9) Isn't there Bêgova? Half of it's inhabitants belong to the Berwarî tribe and the other half to the Gulî tribe. (Unger 1994; 2001a)

How can this difference is degrees of usage be explained? I suggested that an explanation might run as follows: there is a cultural maxim *Don't show superiority to others* which is much more prominent in Kurdish culture than in German or English culture. Thus, it is highly relevant for Kurdish speakers to often communicate compliance with this cultural norm, much more so than for English or German speakers. One way of doing this efficiently is by using the question form, since (sincere) questions typically show that the communicator is not superior in knowledge to his addressee. In contexts where the speaker can be justified in assuming that the audience can easily infer the speaker's intentions behind the preparatory question (i.e. when they are not likely to mistake the preparatory question for a real one), the use of such a question may achieve too things simultaneously, thus saving the audience unnecessary processing effort: it gives evidence of the speaker's informative intention as well as of his intention of communicating compliance to social norms. The audience is thereby also saved processing effort.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I discussed two types of pragmatic accounts of genre: one in which genre the contribution of genre to comprehension is seen as separate from the cognitive-pragmatic comprehension procedure, and one where genre recognition is an integral part of it. I have argued that the former meets severe problems whereas the latter provides a cognitive pragmatic explanation of the role of genre in communication. This account naturally extends to other socio-pragmatic phenomena such as register and cultural differences in ways of expression. Given that genre is a prototypical socio-pragmatic category and that my relevance-theoretic account extends to other

socio-pragmatic categories as well, my conclusion is that socio-pragmatic phenomena in general receive a cognitive pragmatic explanation in relevance-theoretic pragmatics.

In the introduction I said that pragmatic theory surely needs to deal both with socio-pragmatics and cognitive pragmatics. That relevance theory opens up genuine cognitive explanations for socio-pragmatic phenomena shows that this theory is well suited to give a fairly comprehensive account of pragmatics. This means that relevance-theoretic research can fruitfully interact with socio-pragmatic or ethnomethodological enquiries in a new level of cross-disciplinary interaction.

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Author’s address

Christoph Unger, SIL International
Mozartstr. 26
35625 Huettenberg
Germany

Email: christoph-kuelvi_unger@sil.org