

1.3 Current interest in pragmatics There are a number of convergent reasons for the growth of interest in pragmatics in recent years. On the one hand, various syntactic rules seem to be properly constrained only if one refers to pragmatic conditions; and similarly for matters of stress and intonation.²¹ It is possible, in response to these apparent counter-examples to a context-independent notion of linguistic competence, simply to retreat: the . Some of these are essentially historical: the interest developed in part as a reaction or antidote to Chomsky's treatment of language as an abstract device, or mental ability, dissociable from the uses, users and functions of language (an 34 35 The scope of pragmatics abstraction that Chomsky in part drew from the post-Bloomfieldian structuralism that predominated immediately before transformational generative grammar). In the first place, as knowledge of the syntax, phonology and semantics of various languages has increased, it has become clear that there are specific phenomena that can only naturally be described by recourse to contextual concepts. rules can be left unconstrained and allowed to generate unacceptable sentences, and a performance theory of pragmatics assigned the job of filtering out the acceptable sentences.