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Pragmatics and Language Communication

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Pragmatics is the branch of linguistics which studies how utterances communicate meaning in context. The study of meaning is commonly known as 'semantics' and it has long been one of the most daunting and difficult areas of language study. In the 1950s and 1960s, however, linguists and philosophers slowly began to realize that part of the difficulty lay in their failure to distinguish two quite different aspects of meaning.

The first type of meaning is intrinsic to a linguistic expression containing it, and it cannot be separated from the expression. The study of this kind of meaning is the domain of semantics. But there is a second kind of meaning, one which is not intrinsic to the linguistic expression carrying it, but which rather results from the interaction of the linguistic expression with the 'context' in which it is used. And to the study of this kind of meaning we give a new name—pragmatics.

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in situation or in context. It is a medium where we examine how people convey different kinds of meanings with the use of language or how people express a variety of meaning with variety of people. It is the study of mutual world knowledge. It is the only discipline where we study the real role of persons in language use. In studying the use of language, the role of speaker and hearer, the role of the context, the amount of relative quality of language which is used and the relative distance between the speaker and the hearer is important. Pragmatics is the study of the aspects of meaning and language use that are dependent on the speaker, the addressee and other features of the context of utterance.

In pragmatics, we focus only on a spoken language, conversation or how people speak or express their desire when they communicate with others. People express their feelings, desires, point of views and variety of things about their culture, society and so on. But sometimes they have many desires which they do not express or unable to express and there can be variety of reasons for that, for example, fear, inferiority, insult, etc. Pragmatics tries to study human beings at their characterization, feelings, needs, attitudes, volition or volatile personality and many other things through language. Therefore, pragmatics is the study of language used by real people in the real context. According to David Crystal (professor of linguistics at the University of Wales) in the book, *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*:

> Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. (Crystal 240)

Pragmatics is a systematic way of explaining language use in context. Every context has a special meaning and it is the context which decides meaning. So meaning is determined by the relative quality of language used and the intention of speaker to hearer. When we say relative distance, it means how close or distant a person is with another person and how language expresses this distance. Pragmatics is the study of what the speaker means by

saying something and what the hearer understands when something is said or how does a speaker use language in a particular context and how it is interpreted in the use of same context. The first important thing that must be done is to draw a distinction between the meaning of sentences and the meaning of utterances. An utterance is a natural unit of speech bounded by breaths or pauses or in other words, it is a complete unit of talk, bounded by the speaker's silence. Utterance does not have a precise linguistic definition. Phonetically an utterance is a unit of speech bounded by silence. In dialogue, each 'turn' by a speaker may be considered an utterance. According to Geoffrey N. Leech in *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, he says:

> The pragmatic analysis of language can be broadly understood to be the investigation into the aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words and constructions, but from the way in which utterances are used how they relate to the context in which they are uttered. (Leech 290)

An individual when communicate, he/she makes use of utterance. It may or may not be sentence. Whatever is uttered by an individual is an utterance. Every utterance becomes meaningful to the listener. And therefore, no utterance is meaningless, every utterance is meaningful. According to *Cambridge Grammar of English*:

> We use term 'utterance' to refer to complete communicative units, which may consist of single words, phrases, clauses and clause combinations spoken in context, in contrast to the term 'sentence,' which we reserve for units consisting of at least one main clause and any accompanying subordinate clauses, and marked by punctuation (capital letters and full stops) in writing. (243)

If we look at the word 'utterance' the basics word is 'utter,' which is the root word. To utter something is an indigenous process. This process is an act of making sense. It refers both to the process of utterance and the product of uttering. When we talk about a sentence, it is a unit of grammatical process. In sentence, we refer to unit of analysis where as in utterance; we talk about unit of interactions. Normally we make a distinction between utterance and non-utterance. Non-utterance is a kind of sound of without any meaning, sometimes refers to the non-verbal elements of communication used to modify meaning and convey emotion. It may be expressed consciously or unconsciously, for example, sometimes 'silence' becomes meaningful. Other examples of non-utterance signals are, such as gestures, facial expressions, eye contact with the listener, and so on.

Therefore, utterance is the process of communication, for example, a person's sigh is an indication of his or her relief that is the person wants some relaxation because of tiredness. The sound "shhh…" indicates that somebody is caught. A silence or pause or zero sound is also an utterance where silence becomes meaningful. The certain expressions or indications suddenly appear on a person's face, when that person gets angry or happy. Therefore, pragmatics studies the expression of one's personality, behavior, feeling and so on. It shows and also hides one's characterization or nature. Every time the context changes, what is communicated changes as well.

Semiotics is the study of the social production of meaning from sign systems. Semiotics, also called semiology, traces its origins to the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure in the early twentieth century, and particularly to Saussure's idea of the linguistic sign. Semiotics is the study of interaction between structure and meaning both in relation to language and to society. It has been variously described: as the science of signs,

of symbolic behavior or of communication-systems. It is also the symbolic nature of text and textual representations. Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects. According to *An Introduction to Literary Studies*:

> Semiotic methods of analysis which originated in literary criticism have been applied in anthropology, the study of popular culture (e.g., advertisements), geography, architecture, film, and art history. The majority of these approaches emphasize the systemic character of the object under analysis. Buildings, myths, or pictures are regarded as systems of signs in which elements interact in ways analogous to letters, words, and sentences. For this reason, these divergent disciplines are often subsumed under the umbrella-term semiotics (the science of signs). (Klarer 28)

Semiotics is often employed in the analysis of texts (although it is far more than just a mode of textual analysis). Whenever a text is examined, the three things are important—the first is the structure of text (from structure or surface organization of text), the second is what it means on the surface and the third is the real meaning (hidden meaning), which underlie the surface organization in the text. There is a difference between the surface meaning and reality. Semiotics is the study of symbols and it has three components—the first one is the relation to the organization or formal structure that is syntax, the second one is the surface meaning which is the part of semantics and the third one is the hidden or intended meaning, also called pragmatic meaning. Pragmatics is such that the meaning on surface may or may not be underlying.

The role of context is always important in the study of the use of pragmatics. Pragmatics studies the ways that context affects meaning. The two primary forms of context important to pragmatics are 'linguistic context' (the context of language) and 'situational context' (the context of situation). Linguistic context is the discourse that precedes the phrase or sentence to be interpreted whereas the situational context includes knowledge of world; including the speaker, the hearer, third parties and their beliefs. If take one example; "Ramesh is thirsty" both the words 'Ramesh' and 'thirsty' have certain linguistic meaning (or surface meaning) and it is in the state of being something. When these words combine, they give semiotic meaning or linguistic meaning or surface meaning. Pragmatics studies more than the surface meaning that is, it studies the real or intended meaning.

Situational context refers to every non-linguistic factor that affects the meaning of a phrase. An example of situational context can be seen in the phrase "It's cold in here," which can either be a simple statement of fact or a request to turn up the heat, depending on, among other things, whether or not it is believed to be in the listener's power to affect the temperature. It depends on the intention and expectation from the speaker to the hearer. Therefore, the situation demands a particular kind of sentence and this speech situation has three things: place, purpose and people. Here situation is the realization of the context. J.R. Firth, English linguist, is noted for drawing attention to the context-dependent nature of meaning with his notion of "context of situation." He believed that whatever anyone said must be understood in the context of the situation. As utterances occur in real-life context, Firth argued that their meaning derived just as much from the particular situation in which they occurred as from the string of sounds uttered. In his article "The Technique of semantics" (1935), he proposes to use the term 'semantics' to describes his whole approach to language, which is to link all levels of linguistic analysis with their contexts and situations.

For example, a sentence—Do you have pen?—could constitute an offer of a pen, a request for a pen or simply a request for information.

The subject matter of semantics is meaning. It is the branch of linguistics which studies meaning. According to F.R. Palmer in *Semantics*, "Semantics is the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning, and, since meaning is a part of language, semantics is part of linguistics"(Palmer 1). Semantics is the study of the meaning of linguistic expressions. In order to produce surface meaning or linguistic meaning, semantics tries to investigate how a single sentence can have two structures or two meanings. The study of meaning is the study of structure because language has meaning and this meaning is given by structure. This meaning is studied in relation to the person and the context. John Lyons in *Semantics* (Vol. 2) distinguished between the sentence meaning and the utterance meaning. The first denotes the usual meaning that a structure, or word or sentence and any segment may have and the meaning it derives from its placement in certain specific circumstances, or contexts of use. The one important aspect is that when people communicate, they make use of utterances. So pragmatics studies the utterances made by speaker and interpretations made by hearer.

The task of pragmatics is to study, how people express more than they say or express a particular meaning. It tries to study how people perform various kinds of acts through speech. The three important areas in pragmatics are: the study of speech acts, politeness principle, and the conversational principle. Pragmatics is also concerned with the management that is how people manage different kinds of situations. The competence with which a situation is handled is known as 'pragmatic competence.' The data for pragmatics comes from day-today speech, used by the user of language in different context. According to Noam Chomsky in his *Rules and Representations*, "Pragmatic competence is the one that underlies the ability to use language along with the conceptual system to achieve certain ends or purposes" (Chomsky 24) and it determines how the tool can be effectively put to use; it is user-oriented.

The concept of 'communicative competence' (a term coined by linguist Dell Hymes in 1972) grew out of resistance to the concept of linguistic competence introduced by Noam Chomsky (1965). Most scholars now consider linguistic competence to be a part of communicative competence.

> Linguistic competence constitutes knowledge of language, but that knowledge is tacit, implicit. This means that people do not have conscious access to the principles and rules that govern the combination of sounds, words, and sentences; however, they do recognize when those rules and principles have been violated. . . . For example, when a person judges that the sentence John said that Jane helped himself is ungrammatical, it is because the person has tacit knowledge of the grammatical principle that reflexive pronouns must refer to an NP in the same clause. (Fernandez 67)

In 'conversational principle,' pragmatics deals with how people express certain things and how equally it is understood by the other in the process of conversation. Therefore, the data is the conversation that goes between two persons for example, a telephonic conversation is different from day-today conversation, depending on whom a person talks and how he talks. All conversations are structured and have different ways of starting and ending the conversation. 'Turn-taking' is an important aspect of conversation. This is the aspect of conversational structure by which the identity of the speaker changes from time to time. When two persons talk, one is the speaker who speaks and other is the listener who

listens, and in this process of conversation each person takes turn. But when more than two persons are present in the process of conversation then the situation is called 'conversational context.' In general conversation each person takes turn, every person gives a turn to other. Turn-taking is the aspect of co-operating. In conversational analysis, there is always an initiator, who starts the conversation. One important thing is how to begin or end the conversation. It is identified by different types of utterances, which may or may not be spoken and even a sound is meaningful in utterance, for example, gesture is also a part of it. Turn-taking is important part of pragmatics because when people use language, they make use of utterances. It was the American sociologist Harvey Sacks and his colleagues who first draw attention, in the 1970s, to the importance of turn-taking and the rules governing it.

"Speech act" is an attempt at doing something purely by speaking. There are very many things that we can do, or attempt to do, simply by speaking. We can make a promise, ask a question, order or request somebody to do something, make a threat, to name something, pronounce somebody husband and wife, and so on. Each one of these is a particular speech act. The main principle in speech act is "speaking implies doing" or "saying is doing." Speech acts belong to the domain of pragmatics, and their study called 'speech-act theory' is a prominent part of that discipline. J.R. Searle and J.L. Austin developed the concept of speech act relating the meaning of utterance to the context. According to *How to Do Things with Words*:

> [I]n order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) as has been done traditionally. We must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued--the total speech-act--if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. So the total speech act in the total speech situation is emerging from logic piecemeal as important in special cases: and thus we are assimilating the supposed constative utterance to the perfomative. (Austin 78)

According to "Austin on locutionary and illocutionary acts":

> Austin sometimes talks as if in addition to the meaning of sentences there were a further set of conventions of illocutionary force; but in precisely those cases where there is a distinction between force and meaning, the force is not carried by a convention but by other features of the context, including the intentions of the speaker; and as soon as force is tied down by an explicit convention it becomes, or in general tends to become, part of meaning. (Searle 414)

In other words it is either meaning, or intention and other features of context, rather than convention, that determine an illocutionary act which has no illocutionary force indicating device, as the illocutionary act that it is. So 'How do you do?' is an idiom whose meaning, according to Searle, cannot be paraphrased 'In what manner or condition do you perform?'. It has the force of a greeting. But how does it have this force? Is it solely the speaker's intention that determines it in a certain context as such?

The main assumption is that there are a number of utterances that do not report or 'constant' anything, and are not, therefore, 'true or false,' but rather that the uttering of the sentences is, or is part of an action. For example, when we promise to do anything, we actually perform the act of promising, like when a person says "I will certainly do it." Therefore, by saying this, a person is performing the act of promising. It is a promise, not

simply a statement. If someone says, "I bet he will come today," he is simply betting—an action and not making a true or false statement. Statements of this kind are called performative and the verbs which are used in these types of sentences are known as performative verbs. Performatives are further divided into explicit and implicit. The former contains the expression naming the act, "I request you to sit down," and the former does not contain such expression as "Will you sit down?" This means that in performative expression, the naming of the action doesn't seem an absolute necessity, therefore according to F.R. Palmer in *Semantics*, "The performative verb may be omitted without the loss of the illocutionary force" (Palmer 163). J.L. Austin originally distinguished three aspects of a speech act: the locutionary act (the act of saying something and its basic content), the illocutionary act (What you're trying to do by speaking), and the perlocutionary act (the effect of what you say). Today, however, the term speech act is often used to denote specifically an illocutionary act (promising, threatening, informing, persuading, defending, blaming, and so on), and the intended effect of a speech act is its illocutionary force.

Searle believed that in an utterance lie hidden many acts of various kinds: asking, commanding, promising, requesting, declaring, etc. Utterances represent certain actions or acts. For example, if someone says, "Be careful, there is a snake," here shows a threat and somebody is warning someone. By speaking you are performing certain acts. The reverse of performative verbs is 'constative verbs.' The constative verbs are those which do not perform action but provide information. There are five kinds of speech acts: representative, directive, commissive, declarative and expressive speech acts. In 'representative speech acts,' the truth or falsity of the statement is represented, for example—'swear,' 'belief,' 'report,' etc. They all are performative verbs. In 'directive speech acts,' certain verbs that refer to 'command,' 'appeal,' and 'urge' or 'request' are used, for example, "I command you to bring me sweets." 'Commissive speech acts' are related to the commitment of speaker, for example, verbs like—'promise,' 'undertake,' and soon. In 'declarative speech acts,' there is a declaration by speaker, verbs like 'pronounce,' 'announce,' etc. For example, when priest declares by saying, "I hereby pronounce you husband and wife." 'Expressive speech acts' express someone's attitude, verbs like 'congratulate,' 'sorry,' etc. To perform certain speech acts, the speaker must fulfill certain conditions, are called "felicity conditions." If these conditions are not fulfilled by speaker then speech acts in question become unacceptable or unimportant.

Searle accepts that the speech act is the basic unit of meaning and force, or the most basic linguistic entity with both a constative and a performative dimension. He also accepts that there are illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts. His understanding of the latter is similar to Austin's but his understanding of the former is quite different. Searle does not distinguish between the illocutionary act and the locutionary act but rather between the illocutionary act and both an utterance act and a propositional act. As outlined, one can investigate the propositional act under two headings: the reference act and the act of predication. The former is a complete speech act because one can refer to some object without saying anything about it. One cannot say something though without that something being putatively, if not actually, about some object; so the act of predication is an incomplete speech act. With regard to the reference act, Searle accounts for the use of referring expressions in reference acts as follows:

> Any expression which serves to identify any thing, process, event, action, or any other kind of 'individual' or 'particular' I shall call a referring expression. ...It is by their function, not always by their surface grammatical form or their manner of performing their function, that referring expressions are to be known. (Searle 26)

So ‘a man’ in ‘A man came’ refers; but it does not refer in ‘John is a man’. This is clear from the fact that the expression only serves to identify a man in the first example. In the second it predicates the property manness of John. Clearly then ‘is a man’, which is a predicate, cannot stand on its own; it must accompany some referring expression. This is why Searle says that the act of predication “is not a separate speech act at all” (122).

Along with the speech acts, pragmatics also encompasses “politeness principle.” It deals with the linguistic expression of courtesy and social position. Politeness refers to the particular use of language in conformity with the social norms. It also means being courteous, co-operative and providing all possible facilities to others during language use. The opposite of politeness is rudeness. Both rudeness and politeness can be shown verbally and non-verbally. Politeness is always governed by customs, social norms, cultural and mutual relationship among different people. There are certain forms that express polite behavior and a person can use different kinds of language in order to be polite. Politeness is determined by the context, the degree of intimacy and formality between the participants. There are certain words, such as ‘respected,’ ‘kindly,’ ‘please,’ etc., represent politeness in language. When conversation takes place, there is a ‘co-operative principle’ operative here, between the speaker and the hearer, which is also completed by politeness principle. According to this principle, the hearer understands what the speaker means and receives the message. This also controls the direction in which the conversation goes. This principle is formulated by H.P. Grice, who distinguished four categories, each of which contains maxims: the maxim of quantity (the speaker must make his contribution as informative required), maxim of quality (the speaker’s contribution must be true), maxim of relative (the speaker’s information must be relative) and maxim of manner (the speaker should avoid obscurity, ambiguity, disorderliness). Grice defines the cooperative principle in *Studies in the Way of Words*:

> We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the Cooperative Principle. (Grice 105)

Sociolinguists often discuss politeness phenomena in terms of face. Face is what you lose when you are embarrassed or humiliated in public. There are two kinds of face—the positive face and the negative face. Positive face is associated with desire. It is a person’s need to maintain and demonstrate its membership in a social group. Negative face is the face that seeks freedom for action. It is a person’s need to be individual and independent, to get what that person wants without offending anyone. Face is the socially acted projection of one’s self-esteem. “A face-threatening act” is any piece of behavior which can easily make another person lose face; “a face-saving act” is any piece of behavior which lessens or removes the threat of losing face.

The linguistic aspects of politeness have been much studied in recent years, and a number of important variables have been identified: tone of voice, markers of status, terms of address, degrees of certainty or confidence, discourse markers (like English please), the choice between speaking and remaining silent, acceptability of direct questions, and others. The rules of politeness vary considerably from society to society, and it is very easy to give inadvertent offence when talking to speakers of another language. The study of the relation between language and society is a branch of both linguistics and sociology. According to *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, "There are several possible relationships between language

and society. One is that social structure may either influence or determine linguistic structure and/or behavior…" (Wardhaugh 23). He further says, "A second possible relationship is directly opposed to the first: linguistic structure and/or behavior may either influence or determine social structure…. A third possible relationship is that the influence is bi-directional: language and society may influence each other." (24).

For example, speaker of Malagasy (in Madagascar) consider it impolite to give direct answers to questions or to make predictions that might turn out to be wrong. Speakers of Navaho (in the USA) consider it impolite to speak at all in the presence of a higher-ranking person, or to provide their own names. In India, when somebody invites someone, there are several ways of accepting or rejecting the invitation. If a person has to be extreme polite, he or she normally does not use the words that signify refusal, whereas that person provides the justification or reason very politely. Therefore it is inappropriate to say that "X language is more polite than Y language." Different languages simply encode their normal level of politeness with different features.

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in situation or in context. It is a medium where we examine how people convey different kinds of meanings with the use of language or how people express a variety of meaning with variety of people. It is the study of mutual world knowledge. It is the only discipline where we study the real role of persons in language use. Therefore, pragmatics, on the other hand, is much more than semantics. It is a holistic image. It studies the construction of meaning by the speaker and the understanding of that by the hearer. So we can say that pragmatics studies the relation between saying and meaning.

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