

# The Meaning and Scope of Pragmatics

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**Abstract: A traditional criticism has been made, that pragmatics does not have a clear cut focus and in early studies there was tendency to assort those topics without a clear status in linguistics pragmatics. Some complained why that pragmatics is not eligible as an independent field of learning since meaning is already dealt with semantics.**

**However, there is consensus that pragmatics as a separate study is more than necessary because it handles those meanings that semantics overlook.**

**This paper therefore, attempts highlighting the meaning and scope of pragmatics. The paper is generally sub-divided into the following sections: introduction, meaning of Pragmatics, Scope of Pragmatics and Conclusion.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is a relatively new branch of linguistics. Research on it can be dated back to Ancient Greece and Rome where the term “Pragmatics” was found in late 70s. The term “Pragmatics” in Latin and Greek both mean ‘Practical’. Modern use and correct practice of pragmatics is credited to the influence of the American Philosophical Doctrine of Pragmatism.

Moreover, Pragmatics as a branch of linguistics has its origin in Philosophy especially philosophy of language.

The history of the term pragmatics in modern usage is attributed to Charles Morris (1938), who at initial stage of the discipline was concerned with signs of semiotics. Within semiotic. Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry: syntactic; The study of formal relations of signs to one another, semantics; the study of signs in relation to the object to which they are application (designate), and pragmatics: the study of signs in relation to the interpreters Morris (1988).

Moreover, in 1946, Morris made pragmatics the study of the origin of the use of signs. From 1930 through to 1946, up to the present time, pragmatics has continued to grow as an emerging branch of the huge tree of linguistics study. Moreover, according to Chomsky’s (1965) standard theory the new modern meanings of pragmatics have sprung and it is still subject to new definitions.

## II. MEANING OF PRAGMATICS

The word pragmatics derives from the Greek word ‘pragma’, which means ‘matter’ ‘thing’, but also ‘action’ (cf. Linke, Nussbaumer & Portmann (1996).

Though a sub-field of linguistics developed in the late 1970s, some reputable linguistics were able to offer their version as to what they term to be the meaning of pragmatics. However, we restrict ourselves to the following definitions.

“Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning”.

“Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning”

“Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said”

“Pragmatic is the study of the expression of relative distance” (Yule 2008).

Pragmatics is the study of linguistics meaning in relation to a specific speech event (the context of utterance) Leech 1983).

According to Crystal (1985) “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”.

Ever since, Leech (1983) has defined pragmatics as “the study of how utterances have meaning in situations”. While Black More (1982) states that “pragmatics is concerned with the mental structure underlying the ability to interpret utterances in context.

Moreover, according to Kemson (1986) “Pragmatics is the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an uttered sequences of words.

In view of what is discussed, so far, all the definitions of pragmatics are trying to arrive at a particular view that is the effect that the following concepts have on the speakers’ choice of expression and the addressee’s interpretation of an utterance.

- Content of utterance
- Generally observed principles of communication
- The goals of the speaker

For examples

- When a diplomat says yes, he means ‘perhaps’
- When he says perhaps, he means ‘no’
- When he says no. he is not a diplomat
- When a lady says no, she means ‘perhaps’
- When she says perhaps, she means ‘yes’
- When she says yes, she is not a lady.
- Voltaire (Quoted, in Spanish, in Escandell 1993).

### III. SCOPE OF PRAGMATICS

Scope refers to areas of linguistics studies under pragmatics, based on the research carried out for the purpose of this paper it was discovered that no two published accounts list the categories of pragmatics in quite the same order.

Moreover, some linguistics viewed that the aspects of language studies in pragmatics include:

1. Deixes
  2. Speech act theory
  3. Conversational Implicature
  4. Conversational Maxims
  5. Relevance
  6. Presupposition
  7. Applied Pragmatics
  8. General Pragmatic.
1. Deixes: Is a Greek word which means, "pointing" via language, according to Harvey Sacks (1992). He went further to explain that there are some words that cannot be interpreted at all unless the physical context, especially the physical context of the speaker, is known. These are words like here, there, this, that, now, then, yesterday, as well as most pronouns, such as I, you, him, her and them. Some sentences of English are virtually impossible to understand if we don't know who is speaking, about whom, where, and when. For example: you will have to bring that back tomorrow, because they are not here now. Out of context, this sentence is extremely vague. It contains a large number of expressions, such as you, that, tomorrow, they, here and now which depend on interpretation by the immediate physical context in which they were uttered. Such expressions are very obvious examples of bits of a language which we can only understand in terms of speaker's intended meaning. These are technically known as deictic expressions.

Moreover, Stephen Levinson. said that, "Deixes concerns the ways in which language encodes features of the context of utterance and thus also concerns ways in which the interpretation of utterance depends on the analysis of that context of utterance". It's often best described as "verbal pointing" by means of language. The linguistics forms of this pointing according to Stephen are called deictic expressions, which fall into four categories. These are:

- Personal deixes
- Place/spatial deixes
- Time/temporal deixes
- Social deixes.

According to Harvey Sacks, any expression used to point to a person example me, you, I, he, she, and them is an example of persons deixes. Words used to point to a location examples here, there, and above are examples of place deixes, and those words used to point to a time example now, tomorrow, last, week, tonight are examples of time deixes. All these are deitic

expressions have to be interpreted into what persons, what place or what time the speaker has in mind.

Social Deixes: shows the words of respect examples His Excellency, hi eminence, chief excerpter.

1. *Speech Act Theory*: Implying that by each utterance a speaker not only says something but also does certain things.
2. *Locutionary acts*: are simply the speech acts that have taken place.
3. *Perlocutionary acts*: are the effects of the utterance on the listener who accents the best or pledge of marriage is welcomed or warned.
4. *Illocutionary acts*: are the real actions which are performed by the utterance, where saying equals doing as in betting plighting one's truth, welcoming and warning.

Moreover, J. L. Austin (1962) pointed out that there are a number of utterances in language that do not report or they are not constatives, they are not true or false as well but the uttering utterance of an utterance is part of an action

For examples

- a. I name this place post graduate Axis.
- b. I thank all of you for your co-operation.

There are two types of utterances performative constatives in language.

- a. *Performatives*: utterance performing action.
- b. *Constative*: they are reduced to truth or falsity they are facts of communication, to communicate to express certain attitude of speech act performed corresponding to the attitude expressed.

*Performatives*: these are speech acts especially known where the utterance of the right words by the right person in the right situation is effectively accomplished. Whether the speaker in fact has the social or legal (or other kind of standing to accomplish the act depends on some things beyond the mere speaking of the words. These are felicity conditions which can also be explained by the following instances.

The following are some examples from different spheres of human activity, where performatives are found at work.

- Universities and schools, conferring of degrees rustivating or excluding students.
- Governance and civil life crowing of monarchs, dissolution of parliament, passing legislation awarding honours ennobling or decorating.

*Felicity Condition*:

Is part of speech act developed into a category of pragmatics. They are conditions that must be observed. They are subdivided into three; Preparatory condition, conditions for exception, sincerity conditions.

- i. Preparatory: conditions include the status or authority of the speaker to perform the speech act.
- ii. Conditions for exceptions. Are conditions that can assume an exaggerated importance. These are rituals or ceremonial actions accompanying the speech act that people believe that act is invalidated if the action is lacking, for example, after traditional ruler conferred a title to his subject, the turbaning ceremony may not be necessary for the ceremony, it simply serves as a means for better communication.
- iii. Sincerity condition: At a simple level, this shows that the speaker must really intend what he or she says.

In the case of apologizing or promising, it may be impossible for others to know how sincere the speaker is. There are some speech acts such as plighting one's truth or taking an oath-where this sincerity is determined by the presence of witness.

3. *Conversational Implicature*: it was in a series of lectures at Harvard University 1967. The English language philosopher H.P. (Paul) Grice outlined an approach to what he termed conversational implicature, as how hearer manages to work out the complete message when speakers mean more than they say. An example of what Grice meant by conversational implicature is the utterance. (The action of expressing ideas).

Example "Have you gotten any cash on you" where the speaker really wants the hearer to understand the meaning he may say 'can you lend me some money?. I don't have much on me".

The conversational implicature is a message that is not found in the plain sense of the sentence. The speaker implies it. The hearer is able to infer (workout between the lines). This message in the utterance above is appealing to the rules governing successful conversational interactions. Grice proposed that implicatures like the second sentence can be calculated from the first by understanding three things:

- The usual linguistics meaning of what is said
  - Contextual information (shared or general knowledge)
  - The assumption that the speaker is obeying what Grice calls the co-operative principles.
4. *Conversational Maxims*: Implies that, the success of a conversation depends upon the various speakers approach to the interaction. The way in which people try to make conversations worth is sometimes called the cooperative principles.

It was developed by Grice Paul, where he said that "in ordinary conversation speakers and hearers share a cooperative principle. Speakers share this utterance to be understood by hearers. The principle can be explained by four underlying rules or maxims, (David Crystal calls them conversational maxims. They are also sometimes named Gricean maxims). The principles are as follows:

1. *The Maxim of Quantity*:
  - a. Make contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange (nothing more, nothing less).
  - b. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required example if someone asks you how many children do you have? Merely you are expected to mention the numbers of your children only, if they are four just say I have four children without specifying the number of male or female children.

#### 2. *The maxims of quality*

'Try to make your contribution one that is true, "specifically for example,

- a. Do not say what you believe to be false.
- b. Do not say what for which you lack adequate evidence.

Example if someone asks you are you happy? You are expected to say yes or no according to this principle.

#### 3. *Maxim of Relevance*:

Make your contributions relevant. On other hand, any contribution you want make, make it on the issue under discussion.

#### 4. *Maxim of Manner*:

This principle suggests that any contribution should be clear or straight forward.

- a. Avoid ambiguity
- b. Be brief
- c. Be orderly.

In a nutshell, the maxims are social convention of communication and they specify what participants (i.e speaker and hearer) have to do in order to converse in a maximally efficient, rational, cooperative way, they should speak sincerely, relevantly, and clearly, while providing sufficient information.

5. *Relevance*: some linguistics such as Howard Jackson and Peter Stockwell who called it super maxim single out relevance of greater importance than recognized (Grice gives quality and manner as super maxim). Assuming that the cooperate principles is at work in most conversations we can see how hearers will try to find meaning in utterance that seem meaningless or irrelevant. The assumption is that there must be a reason for these in analyzing utterance and searching for relevance we can use a hierarchy of propositions those that might be asserted presupposed entailed or inferred from any utterance.

- Assertion: what is asserted is the obvious, plain or surface meaning of the utterance.

- Presupposition: “I saw the teacher in the class” presupposes that the teacher is in the class.
- Entailments: logical or necessary corollaries of an utterance, thus the above examples entails.
- A. I saw something in the class
- B. Something was seen
- C. There is a class

Inferences: these are interpretations that other people draw from utterance for which we cannot always account from the above examples someone might inferentially, assume that the teacher is or was recently teaching in the class.

6. *Presupposition*: A back ground belief relating to an utterance, that must be mutually known or assured by the speaker and addressee for the utterance to be considered appropriate in context that generally will remain such a necessary assumption whether the utterance is placed in the form of an assertion denial or question and that can generally be associated with a specific lexical item or grammatical feature. On the other hand, presupposition exists between ‘x’ and y such that if the uttering of ‘x’ is valid ‘y’ has to be true. And if y is false, then the uttering of ‘x’ is invalid. Example

- x- He scored an A in exams
- y- He wrote an exam.

In this case if sentence ‘x’ is correct or valid, then sentence

‘y’ is true

- x- She is a widow
- y- Her husband is dead

The following are the related terms of presuppositions

- Potential presupposition
- Presupposition denial
- Presupposition suspension
- Presupposition trigger

7. *Applied Pragmatics*: this branch of pragmatics is concerned with other areas to which pragmatic have potential relevance. These include literature studies, communication studies, interaction speech making and other modes of address. It is also applicable in computer programming and computer languages.

Pragmatics has relevant applications in academics in teacher students discourse which by the use of pragmatics lectures seminars and tutorial will be structure in a way the message will get across effectively.

On other hand, applied pragmatics focuses on problems of interaction that arise in contexts where successful

communication is critical such as medical, interview, judicial settings and counseling.

8. *General Pragmatics*: General pragmatics on the other hand, is the study of the principles governing the communicative use of language, especially, as encountered in conversation principles which may be studied as putative universals, or restricted to the study of specific language.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

This paper highlighted that pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics developed in the 1970s pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech act in a concrete speech situation. Establishing the scope of pragmatics is the most complicated aspect of this paper, because of the lack of a clear consensus that no two published account lists the same categories of pragmatics. Some linguists have different interpretation of pragmatics categories for example some refer to speech acts as performative while others refer to conversational maxim as rhetorical principles. Some linguistics develop sub categories of pragmatics into independent categories e.g felicity condition which is sub category of speech act theory and relevance that is related to conversational maxims.

The pragmatics principles people abide by in one language are often different in another. Thus there has been a growing interest of how people in different language observe a certain pragmatic principle. Cross linguistics, cross cultural studies reported what is considered polite in one language is sometimes not polite in another. Though the objective of this paper is to simply highlight the scope and meaning of pragmatics, not in giving detail, it nonetheless tries to give sufficient explanation of categories and sub categories of pragmatics for clarity and understanding of the content and terminologies.

Finally, it is important to note that most aspects of pragmatics existed as part of linguistics studies before development of pragmatics as sub-field of linguistics studies and pragmatics is still subject to further research and development as a recently emerged subfield of linguistic studies.

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