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Module: Pragmatics, Master 1, Didactics

This is the part that approximately covers the last term.

1. Conversational principles

1.1. Introduction

In an attempt to better explain how speakers mean things that they don't actually say in words, the linguistic philosopher Paul Grice (1967) makes a distinction between "natural" and "unnatural" meanings of utterances. He further argues that a speaker and a hearer are guided by some "conversational principles" in order to make the right references and interpret meaning beyond the linguistic content of an utterance (Grice, 1975). In this unit we shall be discussing in details what the above concepts are and how they may enable us understand how speakers and hearers communicate effectively.

Objectives

At the end, students should be able to:

1. Explain the various conversational maxims
2. Differentiate the maxims
3. Explain the terms "entailment" and "implicature"
4. Distinguish between entailment and implicature
5. Explain the importance of entailment and implicature in encoding meaning.

1.2.Conversational Maxims

Grice observed that when people talk they try to be "cooperative" and attempt to obey some "cooperative principle" which demands that they make their conversational contributions such as is required, at the stage where it occurred, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk in which they are engaged. The conversational principle operates with some "maxims" in the assumption that the speaker does not say what is false, or irrelevant, or too much or too little. The maxims are:

1. QUANTITY (a) Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the conversation), (b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

2. QUALITY Try to make your contribution one that is true (a) Do not say what you believe to be false (b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

3. RELATION Be relevant (your contributions should be such that are relevant to the conversation)

4. MANNER Be perspicuous (a) Avoid obscurity (b) Avoid ambiguity (c) Be brief (d) Be orderly

The cooperative principle determines the way a hearer can deduce some additional information from an utterance above some "truth conditional content" of a message, i.e. if I say: "I have a white elephant", the truth condition content/meaning of this statement is that I actually have an elephant that is white in colour. Anything outside of this is false. Any additional information that is possible in the expression is called "implicature". Conversational implicature actually occurs when the conversational maxims namely quantity, quality, relation (relevance) and manner are seemingly violated, thus "forcing the hearer to make additional assumptions in order to understand the speaker as conveying something true and relevant" (Kempson, 1988:141). In order words, my saying that I have a white elephant seemingly violates the maxim of quality that urges me not to say what is false, even though there might be some personal meaning which I intend to communicate.

i. My present situation is more of heaven on earth ii. Indeed, but to think that time changes yesterday is amazing.

What conversational maxims are seemingly violated by x and y. Think of additional information or implicature that is communicated.

1.3.Entailment

When Grice attempted to distinguish between "natural" and "unnatural" meanings of utterances he was actually referring to entailment and implicature.

(i) I bought a new car

The natural meaning of "I bought a new car" is that at least I paid for a new car which now becomes mine by virtue of the commercial transaction that took place between me and the car dealer. This kind of meaning is what is known as entailment. You can't talk of someone buying a thing without entailing that someone paid for it or at least reaching an agreement to pay later. Entailment is more of semantic concept in that it locates meaning from its "truthful" or "logical" property. If I say Q entails R then it follows that if Q is true, R also has to be true. If it is true that Q bought R, then it true that R has been paid for by Q.

Entailments occur at the level of general meaning and its explicit use has been seen sometimes as a kind of loose paraphrasing technique or summary (Wales, 1989). Grice attempts to show that when people talk they often move from entailments which the conversational principles are concerned with, to "non-natural" meaning variables that often violate some or all of the principles.

Assessment Exercise

1. What is entailment? Give examples for your answer.

2. Why do we need to study properties of entailment in pragmatics?

1.4 Implicature

As we have earlier noted, implicature is a component of speaker meaning that constitutes an aspect of what is meant without necessarily being part of what is said. Interestingly, speakers usually mean more than they say, especially drawing upon the context of the utterance. Implicatures actually occur when the conversational maxims are violated. A statement like “a child is a child” does not seem to be informative enough and therefore breaks the maxim of quantity. But you know what is meant. Look at other examples:

1. Thanks a million (hyperbole)
2. Mirinda – taste the thrill (advert)
3. Who is sufficient all by himself (rhetorical question)
4. Sprite – obey your taste (advert)

Literary devices and advertisements often violate the maxims as we can see above.

Implicatures arise because of interactant’s mutual understanding of the conversational maxims. Non-conventional meanings which arise as a result of flouting some of the maxims become possible since a statement may result in different implicatures in different contexts. This is another way of saying that an implicature is a result of a listener making an inference as the most likely meaning an utterance may have in a given context. The direct implicature of “a child is a child” said at home, may differ if the same statement is made at a school during an inter-house sport. Grice’s “implicature” is synonymous to Yule’s “invisible meaning.” We shall examine some types of implicatures proposed by theorists in Unit 14.

Assessment Exercise What meanings are implicated by the above literary devices and adverts? Say what maxims are seemingly violated.

Assignment

1. Discuss the conversational maxims proposed by Grice 2. Explain the term "Implicature." When do implicatures occur? Give examples to illustrate your answer.

References/Furher Reading

Grundy, P. (2000) Doing Pragmatics 2nd Ed. London: Arnold

Yule, G. (1996) The Study of Language 2nd Ed. Cambridge: CUP

Haugh, M. (2002) "Intuitive Basis of Implicature." Pragmatics 12 (2) 117-134

2. Austin’s Theory of Pragmatics

2.1 Introduction

It is mentioned how speech acts explain the force that utterances have for counting as actions rather than mere giving of information. We also examined how words or utterances perform actions such as promising, commanding, warning, inviting etc. We shall examine some theoretical issues that speech acts raise and the reactions of language scholars to these issues. For example, do all

sentences/utterance perform the kind of actions that Austin suggests? Are the examples that Austin gives as illocutionary acts applicable to all communication events? These and more other questions will be addressed in this Unit.

Objectives

At the end, students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between performative and constative sentences 2. Explain what is meant by the performative formula 3. Describe austin’s infelicities condition 4. Discuss the contribution of austin’s speech acts to the study of pragmatics

2.2 Types of Acts

Austin (1962) postulates that when an individual makes an utterance, he performs (i) the locutionary act, which is the act that utters a sentence with a certain meaning using the grammar, phonology and semantics of the language (ii) the Illocutionary act which is the intention of an utterance to constitute either an act of promise, command, criticism, agreement, greeting, pronouncement etc. (iii) the Perlocutionary act which is the effect or the response it achieves on the hearer like embarrassment, fear, confusion, enjoyment, or amusement. Remember that one utterance or sentence can perform all of the above functions. The illocutionary act is where speakers actually "do things with words". According to Austin, illocutionary act is performed by "performative sentences", because by virtue of its structure, a performative sentence has a "conversational force" like pronouncing a man and a woman husband and wife or sentencing a defendant in court. The illocutionary act carried out by the use of some sentence is to invest the utterance of that sentence with a particular illocutionary force (Palmer, 1996). For example "I pronounce Tayo and Bayo husband and wife" or "I christen this child Anthony." According to Austin, the sentence (that actually performs the act of joining a man and a woman as husband and wife) is called a performative sentence.

Assessment Exercise

Why do you think the illocutionary force is the most important of all the acts proposed by Austin?

2.3 Performatives and Constatives

In order to distinguish between the three acts, i.e. locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, all which take place when utterances are made, Austin argues that sentences that do something (rather than say something) are performatives and, the performative (doing) sentences as we noted in 3.1 above are associated with the illocutionary act - the act especially done in speaking like the ones that christen or marry. Descriptive sentences (i.e. sentences that say something) are called constatives. Austin however argues that every normal utterance has both the descriptive (saying) and effective (doing) properties and that saying something is also doing something.

That act of stating or asserting something (that appears like illocutionary acts) are referred to as "canonical constatives" and such sentences are by assumption not performatives. So, a sentence like "star is a brighter life" is not performative. The acts of ordering or requesting (accomplished by imperative sentences) and the acts of asking (accomplished by interrogative sentences) are "dubious examples of performative sentences" (Sadock 2006:55). Hence a sentence like "leave my office immediately" is not performative. Austin concludes that locutionary aspect of speaking (locutionary act) is primarily in the domain of constatives, while the performative sentences are in the domain of illocution (performing illocutionary acts).

The perlocutionary act, also performed by speaking is the effect of the illocutionary act on the addressee's feeling, thought or action. Using the above example, it is producing the belief that Bayo and Tayo are now husband and wife or causing people to believe that a child is christened Anthony.

Now the question scholars ask is, what really is the difference between illocutionary act and perlocutionary act because both of them has almost the same force on the hearer?

Austin agreed that there's a difficulty in distinguishing illocution and perlocution. But he suggests that illocution is "conventional in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula; but the latter could not" (1962:103 cited in Sadock 2006:55). This formula test however, merely tells us what illocutionary act is not but fails to tell us what illocution is. Searle (1975, Allan 1998) agrees that a potential expression by means of performative sentence is a sufficient criterion for recognising an illocution. Sadock (1977) does not agree. Austin himself says that to be an illocutionary act the means of accomplishing it should be conventional. Most scholars adopt Austin's explicit performative in the treatment of illocution. But the treatment of threat (threatening) has remained problematic (Sadock 2006). If I tell you: "if you don't leave my office now, I call the police" I'm certainly threatening you without using a conventional performative like: "I threaten you…" We shall look at the performative formula below to understand better what Austin means by "conventional" or "explicit performative."

Assessment Exercise

With your understanding of performatives and constatives, differentiate between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

2.4 The Performative Formula

Austin's performative formula attempts to define performative utterances in terms of a grammatical formula for performatives. The purpose is to make explicit the illocutionary act that the speaker intends to carry out in uttering the sentence. The formula is as follows:

(i) "I (hereby) verb-present-active X

The formula begins with a first person singular subject (often a pronoun) and an active verb in the simple present tense that makes explicit the illocutionary act. In addition, the formula may contain the self-referential adverb hereby (Sadock 2006). Such forms Austin calls explicit performatives as opposed to primary performatives.

Therefore the following sentences follow the performative formula and are explicit performatives, performing illocutionary acts:

(a) I (hereby) christen this child Anthony (b) I pronounce you, husband and wife (c) I sentence you to 2 years imprisonment, etc.

This formula according to Austin, however is not a sufficient criterion (without the adverb hereby) for determining performatives because there are descriptive (or constative) sentences that fit into the formula. For instance a sentence like: "I pronounce it that it is well," fits into the formula although it not performative sentence. It also clear that there are other forms that differ from the formula that may be considered as performatives. Look at the following sentences:

(d) You are sentenced to 2 years imprisonment (e) The court sentences you to 2 years imprisonment (f) You are fired (g) Come here

All the above utterances may serve as substantial performative without the formula. Austin therefore concluded that the performative formula was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for recognising those sentences we may call performatives (Sadock 2006).

Assessment

Write out five examples of sentences that may be called performatives even though they do not follow the performative formula.

2.5 Infelicities

When does speech act work? When does it fail? Austin uses the doctrine of infelicities to explain when performatives fail. If you see a man and a woman in the street and tell them: “I pronounce you husband and wife,” of course, you may not be lying but whoever takes you serious and begins to say: one student pronounces this couple husband and wife will certainly be blamed for uttering something false. Because you are not in position to pronounce a man husband and wife, although you may have uttered a correct performative sentence, you are not aptly described as false but as “improper,” “unsuccessful,” or “infelicitous.” Austin distinguishes between three categories of infelicities namely:

(a) Misinvocation, which disallow a purported act (i.e. a pretended act – something done hard to believe). For example an individual who is not traditionally vested with the power to marry a couple, or christen a child is disallowed from performing it. Similarly, no purported act of banishment is allowed in Nigeria (as in some societies of the world). So anyone that attempts to perform the act of banishment Nigeria will be considered infelicitous.

(b) Misexecution, - when the act is vitiated (weakened or destroyed) by errors or omission occurring while performing the act by the right authority. For example if a priest/pastor fails to use the right names or fails to complete the ceremony of marriage, the purported act does not take place.

(c) Abuses – were the act succeeds, but the participants do not exhibit the right attitude or thought associated with the happy performance of such act – through insincere promises, mendacity (false statement) or unfelt congratulations etc. (Sadock 2006).

Assessment Exercise

Explain the term “infelicities” as used by Austin. Illustrate your answer with examples.

2.6 Searle's Contribution

Searle (1969:22) argues that "speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behaviour." Therefore speech act is the basic unit of communication in language through which acts are performed according to rules. He believes that speech acts are intentional behaviours and like Austin, he distinguishes between the "illocutionary act" which he considers as "complete" speech act and "perlocutionary act" which is the effect or consequence of the illocutionary act on the hearer. He also distinguishes "utterance act" (the act of uttering words) which Austin calls "phatic acts" from "propositional acts" (act of referring/predicating). On his rule-based acts, Searle identifies two kinds of rules (i) regulative rules (ii) constitutive rules. Regulative rules "regulate antecedently or independently existing forms of behaviour." (p.33). Constitutive rules create or define new rules of behaviour. They constitute and regulate an activity whose existence is logically dependent on the rules (Adegbija, 1999). The rules of football for instance not only regulate the game but create the very possibility of playing such a game (Searle, 1969).

Searle borrows and revises Grice's (1957) notion of meaning which proposes the view that if speaker (x) means something by z (x) intended the utterance of z to produce some effect on hearer (y) by means of y recognition of x's intention. Searle argues that this notion of meaning based on intended effects fails to take into account the extent to which meaning can be a matter of rules or convention and confuses illocutionary acts with perlocutionary acts. He emphasizes the need to capture the intentional and conventional aspects of the relationships between them in our account of illocutionary acts. Searle's theory of pragmatics tends to combine some important aspects of Grice's intentional theory of meaning with Austin's conventional theory of speech acts and therefore appears richer than Austin's.

Assessment

1. Write a summary of Searle's theory of pragmatics.

2. With your understanding of performatives and constatives, differentiate between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

3. Explain the term “infelicities” as used by Austin. Illustrate your answer with examples.

References/Further Reading

Grundy, P. (2000) Doing Pragmatics 2nd Ed. London: Arnold

Yule, G. (1996) The Study of Language 2nd Ed. Cambridge: CUP

Sadock, J. (2006) “Speech Acts” in Horn L. and Ward G. (eds) The Handbook of Pragmatics. Oxford: Blackwell

3. Grice’s Theory of Conversational Implicature

3.1 Introduction

We were introduced above to the Grice’s implicature which is the additional information that is deducible from an utterance outside of its entailment. To arrive at the implicature, we noted that one or more of the conversational maxims may have been violated, which forces the hearer to make some valid inferences as to the real intention of the speaker. In this unit, we shall be considering some more concepts associated with Grice’s theory of implicature and how they enable us understand better how speakers and hearers are able to communicative effectively. We shall also consider some reactions by scholar to the Gricean notion of implicature.

Objectives

At the end, students should be able to:

1. Mention and explain some types of implicatures

2. Describe non-conversational implicature

3. Distinguish between implicature and explicature

4. Explain the relationship between implicature and social meaning

3.2 Types of Conversational Implicature

Grice identifies two types of implicature (i) generalized conversational implicature (ii) particularized conversational implicature. Generalized conversational implicature occurs irrespective of the context. Some Chinese are Muslims. Five liters of this fuel ill start my engine.

The two statements above give rise to the same generalized implicatures regardless of the context they occur. And they remain implicatures rather than entailment because in statement (i) some Chinese are Muslims, it is clear that the statement may be denied. The implicature is that not all Chinese are Muslims; in fact we have more Muslims in the north than there are elsewhere. Statement (ii) 5 litres of fuel starts my engine, may as well be denied because the statement did not say that 5 litres is all that my engine needs to start. The engine actually requires 70 litres. The case of the generalized implicature is that the same inference, i.e. that not all Chinese are Muslims and that my engine needs more than 5 litres to run, are the most likely irrespective of the context.

However, statement (i) above may give rise to other forms of implicatures which depends on the context. For example some Chinese are Muslims, while some are Buddhist; some are neither Muslims nor Buddhist, some are traditional religionists etc. Similarly for statement (ii) someone might even conclude that less than 5 litres may start my engine or more etc. Because these implicatures depend on the context of use, Grice calls them 'particularized implicature.' A particularized implicature is different from the generalized implicature that is associated with words like some since they are the inferences we need to make as they relate to some particular contexts.

You will recall that one of the conversational maxims is relation or relevance, i.e. make your contribution relevant to the conversation/context. If all implicatures were particularized, one can reasonably argue that the maxim of Relation (relevance) is enough to account for all implicatures, because the implicature would be what the addressee has to assume to render the utterance relevant to the context (Grundy, 2000). But generalized conversational implicature does not rely on how relevant an utterance is to a context, rather on quantity (maxim of Quantity) and manner (maxim of Manner). When a speaker uses the word 'some' it is because s/he is not in position to use the word 'all' and is therefore taken to imply 'not all' by the Maxim of Quantity (Grundy, 2000). This is explained in the figure below:

Said/entailed generalized

Conveyed Conversationally implicated

particularized

(Grundy 2000:83)

The above data gives rise to what is known as 'scalar implicature.' According to Gazdar (1979) implicature therefore operates with scales, so that one scale would include 'some' and 'all' and another 'do brilliantly' and 'make progress.' What this means is that if you take any item on a scale, the items above or below it is automatically excluded. In other words you cannot choose 'some' and 'all' at the same time. It you choose 'do' you automatically exclude 'make'. Gazdar gave other hypothetical scales as <certain…probable…possible><and…or> and <must…may…might> (Grundy, 2000). This explains why you are not likely to get confused if I ask you:

(iii) Would you like Coke or Fanta? Of course you know that I'm not asking you to choose both. My choice of 'or' has excluded the possibility of 'and' so you're sure I'm saying it's either Coke or Fanta and not both. By the notion of scalar implicature, because 'or' is on the scale below 'and' a speaker selecting 'or' (as I have done) would be implying 'not and.' Thus either Coke or Fanta or both is an entailment and either Coke or Fanta but not both is an implicature (Grundy, 2000). If you listen to people converse, you will notice that they apply the notion of these scales without even realizing it.

Assessment

Describe the different types of conversational implicatures proposed by Grice?

3.3 Non-Conversational Implicature

Another term for describing 'non-conversational implicature' is 'conventional implicature' which according to Levinson 1983:127 is the 'non-truth conditional inferences that are not derived from super-ordinate pragmatic principles like the maxims, but are simply attached by convention to particular lexical items or expressions.'

Assessment Exercise

1. Can you give other examples of non-conversational implicature?
2. "Even babies understand pain." Try to explain the meaning of the conventional implicature 'even.'

3.4 Explicature

The term "explicature" was first used by Sperber and Wilson in their book titled: Relevance: Communication and Cognition, 2nd edition, (1995). They argue that the single principle of relevance is enough to explain the process of utterance interpretation and understanding. They replaced the Gricean notion of implicature (a non-conventional meaning recovered by making some inferences) with a two-stage process in which the hearer recovers first an explicature which is an inference or series of inferences that enrich the under-determined form of the utterance to a full propositional form, and then an implicature - an inference which provides the hearer/reader with the most relevant interpretation of the utterance (Grundy, 2000). We can then say that explicature is an enrichment of an original utterance to a fully elaborated propositional form. Look at the following examples:

(i) First Bank: truly the first (ii) Limca: 1st for taste, Sperber and Wilson believe that Gricean implicature leaves the addressee with too many probabilities and therefore propose a Relevance theory that goes beyond these probabilities to enable addressees to be sure that they have recovered the most relevant of a all possible set of inferences. If an addressee is able to recover the explicature of a proposition, it becomes easier for him/her to make the right inference. Sperber and Wilson also identified a “higher level explicature” which seeks to reveal the propositional attitude of the speaker to his/her utterance. In other words, the speech acts description for the utterance. This means that even where an utterance is explicit enough (may be associated with an explicature) there is still a higher level explicature which the addressee needs to recover. Speech acts are therefore treated as attitude to propositions rather than as actions.

It is argued that explicature (i.e. inference/series of inferences that enrich/elaborate the under-determined form…to a full propositional form) are motivated by the indeterminacy of language (Grundy 2000). This indeterminacy is as a result of the economy of expression which characterizes natural language. A lot of expressions may represent or mean other things which require inferential process to be able to arrive at their full interpretation. Even where utterances with straightforward grammatical relations are made, there may still be some possible semantic relations that may be inferred with different uses of the expression. So utterances require some degree of enriching or fleshing for the most relevant inference to be made about their meaning.

Assessment

1. Differentiate between Explicature and Implicature.
2. Explain the terms ‘generalized implicature’ and ‘particularized implicature’ 2. Differentiate between Explicature and Implicature

References/Further Reading

Grundy, P. (2000) Doing Pragmatics 2nd Ed. London: Arnold

Yule, G. (1996) The Study of Language 2nd Ed. Cambridge: CUP

Horn L. and Ward G. (eds)(2006) The Handbook of Pragmatics. Oxford: Blackwell

4 Pragmatics and Discourse Markers

4.1. Discourse Markers

Discourse Marker (DM) generally refers to "a syntactically heterogeneous class of expressions which are distinguished by their function in discourse and the kind of meaning they encode" (Blakemore 2006:221). There has not been a consensus among linguists as to what they are and how many they are in English. Some scholars have used such terms as pragmatic marker, discourse connectives or discourse particle to describe a discourse marker and again it is difficult to conclude that they all refer to the same thing. Using Blakemore's model, we shall give examples of Discourse markers (DMs) in English as:

Well, but, so, indeed, in other words, as a result, now

To call the above items 'discourse markers' is probably intended to explain the fact that they must be described at the level of discourse rather than sentence. The term 'marker' is to reflect the fact that their meanings must be analyzed in terms of what they indicate or mark rather than what they describe (Blakemore 2006). But one thing is clear and it is that DMs function as markers of relationships between units of discourse. They are important to pragmatic research because they are expressions that often contribute to non-truth-conditional sentence meaning distinguished from other expressions by their roles in indicating relationship of the basic message to the foregoing discourse (Fraser, 1996).

Bearing in mind that pragmatics is viewed as meaning minus truth condition (while semantic is the study of truth-conditional meaning),

DMs fall to pragmatics because they do not contribute to truth conditional content of the utterance that contains them. Look at the following example:

A. You're likely to go for your lunch earlier today, right? B. Well, I haven't thought of that A. I forgot to tell you that Okay left this morning but forgot this laptop B. Poor him.

You will agree that B's use of 'well' does not contribute to the meaning of his response which basically is that he hadn't thought of going for lunch earlier. The same thing happens in A's second statement. Although the suggestion of contrast in the use of 'but' is noted, it still does not contribute to the meaning of the statement which is that (i) Okay had travelled (ii) He forgot his laptop. Some linguistics have argued that DMs do not contribute to truth-condition and that truth condition itself is a property of mental representation rather than linguistic representation (Carston, 2000; Blakemore 1996, 2000). This we see clearly in the above examples. The natural question that arises now is: if DMs do not contribute to truth-condition meaning what do they contribute to?

It is important to note here that DMs are not the only examples of nontruth conditional meaning. Fraser (1990, 1996) gave four examples of 'pragmatic markers' that express non-truth conditional meaning: (i) Basic Markers (e.g. please) which indicate the force of the intended message (ii) Commentary Marker, which comment on the basic message (e.g. frankly) (iii) Parallel Marker (e.g. damn), which encode an entire message…separate and additional to the basic and/or commentary message (iv) Discourse Marker (e.g. after all, but and as a result) which in contrast to commentary markers do not contribute to 'representational meaning' but only have 'procedural meaning, signaling how the basic message relates to the prior discourse (Blakemore 2006).

You will recall that Grice (1957) had earlier pointed out how implicature represents meaning above some truth-condition meaning. He later pointed out that while some utterances communicate information about the 'central or ground-floor' speech act, DMs like but or so communicate information about a 'non-central or higher level' speech act (Grice, 1989). In the example above A performs a ground floor statement that Okay has travelled and has forgotten his laptop and at the same time a non-central speech act by indicating that he is drawing a contrast between the two parts of the statement. The function of but is to signal the performance of this act and hence it does not affect the truth value of the utterance. Those aspects of linguistic meaning that contribute to the content of the ground-floor statement are said to contribute to what is said, while those aspects of meaning which signal information about the performance of a non-central act are said to contribute to what is conventionally implicated. (Blakemore 2006)

Self Assessment Exercise 1

"They don't read the Quran, so I decided to bring the Bible to them."

Identify the truth condition proposition of the above statement; what do you think is the function of 'so' in the statement?

In his "pragmatics of non-sentences" Stainton (2006) points out that while interactants communicate with words such as 'Lagos' (as an answer to a question like 'where do you live?') or a noun phrase like 'my father' in answering a question like 'who pays your school fees?' they also do utter fully grammatical expressions "which happen to be less-than-sentential nouns and Nps, adjectives and AdjPs, as well as PPs, VPs, and so on." In order words, "speakers routinely utter bare words and phrases not syntactically embedded in any sentences, and they thereby perform speech acts like asserting, asking, commanding and so on" (2006:266). While we may not be concerned with theoretical issues raised by Stainton here, we must acknowledge the fact that both oral and written communications demonstrate the various ways language users perform acts, since they do not always have to speak or write in what theoretical grammarians may classify as "correct sentences." An expression such as "the head of department" uttered by one of your friends at seeing a car driving in from the gate, is not a sentence but a noun phrase and the function of asserting which it performs is not from a prior linguistic context, rather a non-linguistic context. Similarly, if you say: "playing too careful" as you watch the Super Eagles, you appear to utter a verb phrase, but you have definitely made a point. Statements that are not necessarily sentences appear in newspaper headlines, book titles, labels, adverts or other marketing communications. These appear as single words or phrases and interestingly readers are able to recognize their illocutionary force or the kind of speech acts they perform. Some linguists however believe that whenever a non-sentence is uttered, producing some speech act, the speaker actually uses a sentence. They think that non-sentence expressions may in fact be described as elliptical sentences. The term ellipsis is when certain items in a sentence are understandably elided, e.g. he has left the room, may just be 'he has left.' Stainton argues that this kind of explanation may be explaining away the existence of genuinely non-sentence speech acts.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

Distinguish between ellipsis and non-sentence speech acts ii. Give examples of non-sentence speech acts

4.2. Pragmatics of Deferred Interpretations

The term "Pragmatics of Deferred Interpretations" is borrowed from Nunberg (2006) to explain further the fact that we often use expressions to refer to something that is not part of the denotational sense of that expression. In Unit 7 where we examined the term 'reference' in details, we noted that the natural language system enables us to use one thing to refer to another with which it has some close association. In the context of deference, Nunberg (2006) points out that figurative expressions such as metaphor, metonymy, polysemy etc. are cases of deferred interpretations. Although many linguists or language users generally have considered, figuration as a mere play of language use with some stylistic effects, Nunberg argues that metaphors for instance are marked by background assumptions with cultural interests and that what creates the stylistic effect of say: wigs for judges, is "not the mechanism that generate it, but the marked assumptions that license it…the playful presupposition that certain (professionals) are better classified by their attire than by their function" (2006:344). If you will recall, Grice (1967) treats metaphors and other figures of speech as some kind of implicature, involving the violations of some truth-conditions. Nunberg however argues that deferred uses of expressions operate through a process of "meaning transfer" which is purely a pragmatic process. "Meaning transfer is the process that allows us to use an expression that denotes one property as the name of another property, provided there is a salient functional relation between the two" (p.346). So where there is a correspondence between the properties of one thing and the properties of another, the name of the first property is often used to refer to the properties of the other. So examples of metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche are in fact cases of meaning transfer. If I say "we need more hands to finish the work" (synecdoche) where "hand" represents "men" there is a correspondence between the assumed properties of hands and that of men (hands being part of a man's body) which in turn correspond with work (For a full detailed discussion see Geoffrey Nunberg: "The Pragmatics of Deferred Interpretation" in The Handbook of Pragmatics, Blackwell, 2006)

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

Give an example of a metaphor and try to relate it with the pragmatic principle of meaning transfer.

4.3.Pragmatics of Language Performance

Clark (2006) observes that traditional pragmatics had concentrated so much on "pre-planned, non-interactive" language, like that of novels, newspapers, broadcasting etc, without sufficient attention to interactive language performance in real life situations. In his paper "pragmatics of language performance" he insists that in order to fully appreciate how language users interact, we must pay attention to "spontaneous, interactive language" of canteens, classrooms, offices, kitchens or football fields. In real life communicative context, speakers decide what to say and how to say it. For instance speakers will naturally apply discourse strategies such as repetitions, hesitations, fillers or even speech errors to communicate effectively. The language of conversation according to Clark is the best form of language in use that must be of interest to modern pragmatics. The interactive language of conversation is performed through "communicative acts" and such interactive language has its origin in joint activities. "When people do things together in cafes, classrooms, and offices, they need to coordinate their individual actions, and they use a variety of communicative acts to achieve that coordination…communicative acts are themselves joint actions that require coordinating, and people have a special class of communicative acts for this coordination" (Clark 2006:266). Communicative acts include (i) Signal made up of 'content' and 'performance' (ii) display made up of indicating (or pointing).

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Explain Clark's concept of communicative acts in the light of the earlier proposition by Austin.

References/Further Reading

Yule, G. (1996) The Study of Language 2nd Ed. Cambridge: CUP

Horn L. and Ward G. (Eds.) (2006) The Handbook of Pragmatics. Oxford: Blackwell

5. Pragmatics and some Aspects of Language

5.1. Pragmatics and Grammar

Scholars of pragmatics believe that every grammatical truth-condition construction in any natural language has a non-truth condition equivalent that has pragmatic values (Horn 1993, Green 2006). This means that some grammatical constructions which we take for granted as truth-condition statements have some definable pragmatic equivalents. We shall discuss one or two simple examples of this in this sub-section. Now, look at the following sentences:

(1) a. The child was knocked down by a car b. 50 protesters were shot c. Some bags of the killer-beans had been sold before it was discovered that it was dangerous

The above constructions or sentences are passive constructions. Why do speakers/writers sometimes (deliberately) choose passive constructions over active ones? Looking at sentence 1a, the truth condition of the sentence is simply that a child was knocked down by a car. But the intention of the speaker (non-truth condition value) may be to highlight the seriousness of knocking down a child; hence 'the child' is made prominent as the topic of the sentence (receiving sentence stress). It may merely be to defer information about the agent (the car) till the end of the sentence. It is also possible that the speaker or writer may be deliberately silent about the agent as in sentence 1b. If this statement (1b) appears as a newspaper headline, one may conclude that the newspaper is protecting the interest of the police who are the likely shooters of protesters. Using passive constructions allow the expression of the agent to be entirely suppressed, enabling a speaker to accommodate the fact that it is unknown (as in 1b) or irrelevant (as in 1c) or just avoid saying who the agent is even if the speaker knows (Green 2006). Let us look at other examples:

(2) a. She was made to stand for five hours b. He was selected as the best student of English c. His suggestion was rejected

Using a passive also implies that the event being described had some effect on some individual within a particular context. Often the individual is the agent as in 2a. She (the agent) is made to stand for five hours. We are not told who made her to stand for that long hours but we are made to feel for her. The intention of the speaker might just be to appeal to our emotion. The effect of the situation on the agent may be positive as in 2b and again negative as in 2c. The pragmatic value of that statement might be that the speaker believes that the fact of the rejection may include his person and not just the suggestion.

The point we are making here is that certain conditions expressed in grammar point to beliefs and attitudes of the speaker which amount to presuppositions, and they are so strongly linked to syntactic constructions. So we cannot just hold on to grammatical constructions alone without reference to those beliefs and attitudes that underlie the constructions. Green (2006) uses time relations to explain this fact. For example we use the present tense to refer to future time so long as the event referred to is assumed to be 'prearranged.' If I say:

(1) a. The Super Eagles play their first match tomorrow b. The Super Eagles are going to play their first match tomorrow

I can use 1a, to represent Ib in many of the same situations because the event is mutually understood and prearranged more because the speaker and hearer are speaking from the same contextual platform.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. Think of other examples involving the use of verbs or adverbs that illustrate the interaction of grammar and pragmatics.
2. Write at least five passive constructions and explain their pragmatic values
3. Pragmatics and the Lexicon

Earlier in this study when we endeavoured to make a distinction between pragmatics and semantics, we noted that semantics dwells on the linguistic aspects of representing the formal (or universal) meaning of words and sentences, while pragmatics is concerned with the context/speaker's meaning. Thus in examining the pragmatics of lexicon, we are simply considering the tendency of words or lexical units having pragmatic meanings. Some scholars of semantics even agree that a full account of lexical meaning has to include more information than that which allows one to discriminate the meanings of different words (Blutner, 2006). Let's look at the following examples taken from Blutner 2006:489:

2(a) Should we take the lion back to the zoo? (b) Should we take the bus back to the zoo?

What is the difference between the meaning of 'take back' in sentence (2a) and that in (2b)? You will agree that the lion is the object being taken back to the zoo, while the bus is the instrument that takes back to the zoo. You will also notice that 'the zoo' in (2a) is different from what is meant in (2b) in relation to the two items (i.e. the lion and the car). The pragmatic components of utterances is usually embedded on the different conceptual setting or context especially with words that do not discriminate two occurrences like 'take back' in the above sentences.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. What do you think is the meaning of 'the zoo' in (2a) and (2b)
2. Explain the meaning of see in the following statements:

(a) I would like to see the Vice Chancellor (b) I see what you mean (c) To get the contract, you may have to see the personal manager

3. Differentiate between the meanings of settle or settled in the statements below:

(d) We eventually settled in the FCT after two years of indecision (e) At 35, I think it about time you settled down (f) You can’t go because you have not settled the seller (g) Settle the policeman if you must have your driver’s license back

5.2.Pragmatics and Intonation

A lot of research evidences abound on the role of prosodic variation, i.e. intonation (high/low; rising/falling tones) accent, contours, pauses, etc. in the interpretation of a wide range of utterances (e.g. Bolinger 1986, Ladd 1996, Hirschberg 2006). In this section, we shall endeavour to show how intonation may affect the interpretation of syntactic structures as well as some semantic phenomena. We shall also examine a few examples on the relationship between changes in intonation and discourse structure and the role of intonational variation in the interpretation of some speech acts.

There have been a lot of interests among linguists over the years in defining a mapping between prosody and syntax and some agree that prosodic phrases divide utterances into meaningful segments of information (Hirschberg 2006). And it is possible that phrase boundaries may indicate differences in the interpretation of certain syntactic attachments such as prepositional phrases, adverbial modifiers or relative clauses. It has also been found that "the presence or absence of a phrase boundary can distinguish prepositions from particles and can indicate the scope of modifiers in conjoined phrases" ((Hirschberg 2006:523). Look at the following sentences and see whether you can identify how phasing indicate possible difference interpretations. Phrase is marked by '\'.

(a) I help the child /with the red cap (b) The teacher speakers English and French/ you know (c) The student that reads poems/ is absent (d) My Dad laughed /at the party

Where syntactic ambiguity exists (as with some examples above) prosodic variation may influence their disambiguation. Pitch accent has been the usual way of conveying some nominals.

At the semantic level, accent has also been used in the interpretation of sentences especially with highlighting the focus of the statements. Consider the following examples:

The role of intonation has also been studied in the interpretation of some discourse phenomena. Pronouns for instance are markable using varying tones or may in fact be accented and interpreted differently depending on whether they are prominent or not in different contexts. If you hear a politician or a middle class businessman say:

(p) ME, you're talking to ME like that…. Or (q) I don't belong to THEIR club, you can easily interpret what the 'ME' and 'THEIR' represent. Most times, accented pronouns like the ones above are usually (overtly) corroborated by the expression of the face of the speaker. The air of arrogance and pride is usually unmistakable.

Intonational variations may also be used to perform speech acts especially in conveying syntactic mood (e.g. the imperative 'HOLD it'), speaker attitude, belief or emotion. "Some inherent meaning has often been sought in particular contours – though generally such proposals include some degree of modulations" (p.533). Voice contours can also be used to distinguish between direct and indirect speech acts. For example, a question requiring yes or no answer may elicit a statement answer depending on intonation. Your visitor, standing on the door says: "Are you around?" and you reply: "Please do come." A question like "are you around?" in its literal sense will demand a simple yes or no but in this context may be interpreted as a request or perform some action. Look at another example:

(r) I like girls (s) I like girls?

The above examples show that a declarative statement may be turned to a question by using a rising tone or contour. Also, some indirect speech acts such as "you packed your car on the road" or "the door is open" are rendered as direct statements with usually no rising contour. But a speaker may choose to accent any of the lexical items such as 'road' or 'open' to highlight the focus of the statement. These examples no doubt show the interaction of linguistic pragmatics with intonation.

5.3.Pragmatics and Core Linguistics

Linguistics is formally defined as the scientific study of language and it subfields, i.e. phonology, lexis, syntax and semantics are often referred to as 'core linguistics.' Already we have endeavoured to explain the interaction of pragmatics with these subfields by pointing out the mediatory roles pragmatics plays in providing answers associated with meaning in relation to the context, especially where these subfields have failed to relate meaning to social life. For instance, the formal semantic assumption that the meaning of a sentence is to know the conditions under which the sentence is true or false does not capture all we mean by meaning; hence the distinction between semantics and pragmatics; while the questions of truth and falsity (truth conditionality) is a matter of semantics, pragmatics handles the rest especially about the judgements that a speaker makes in his decision about what to say, how to say it and when to say it (Palmer, 1996). As a matter of fact pragmatics tends to simplify semantic analyses (Levinson, 1983).

At the level of grammar, we noted that speakers/writers are not always governed by lexical or syntactical rules. Indexical references/social deixis that pose problems to specialists in morphology and grammar are explained in terms of implicatures. A sentence such as: "I am speaking to us" where 'us' is a matter of honorifics, may be considered faulty, from a purely syntactic position. We have also noted that while speakers and writers do utter fully grammatical expressions, they also routinely utter bare words and phrases not syntactically embedded in any sentences, and they thereby perform speech acts like asserting, asking, commanding etc. When discussing the theories of speech acts, we also noted that the essential syntactic facts about sentence-types (declarative, imperative, interrogative etc.) are related to the concept of illocutionary act. According to Austin, 'performative' sentence, have some illocutionary 'force' that are found in verbs. We are also familiar with the fact that much interactions exist between indirect illocutionary force and sentence structure, which logically establishes the relationship between discourse/conversational structure and syntax (Levinson, 1983). For instance, conversational organisations such as turn-taking and repair mechanism involve syntactic processes. Some movement rules and the concept of focus/topic relate to how certain items are brought forward, indicating how certain information may come before others. Much of these lexical and syntactic processes have their pragmatic implications.

We have also related pragmatics with phonology showing how prosodic variations do indeed signal pragmatic information. We noted that intonation, stress, or accent clearly play some significant roles in disambiguating items, interpreting discourse information, and performing speech acts. On the whole we can see clearly that pragmatics perform what we may call ‘bridging’ roles among the various subfields of linguistics.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Write a summary on the relationship between pragmatics and other linguistic subfields.

5.4.Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is defined as the study of language in relation to the society (Hudson, 1980) while pragmatics is concerned with the study of language use in relation to the social context. Sociolinguistics cuts across many levels of linguistics and due to the many areas of common interests that the two disciplines share, it has been very difficult to draw a clear boundary between them. Some scholars believe that pragmatics is in fact a sub-field of sociolinguistics. In studying language in its social context, two important functions of language come to the fore: (i) language or speech is used as a means of communication (ii) it is used as a means of identifying social groups. These two functions are performed on definite social contexts, beliefs, cultures and world views. These variables in turn influence linguistic choices and what pragmatic implications these choices may have. Studies in pragmatics over the years have revealed interesting insights in the interfaces of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, showing how speech acts are performed in conversations and how speakers in socio-cultural contexts adopt pragmatic principles to encode meaning to achieve certain results on the mind of their hearers. Sociolinguistic variables such as age, social class, status, education etc. often influence what kind of speech act or indirect speech acts that are performed. These complementary roles clearly reveal that sociolinguistics has contributed immensely to certain areas of pragmatics especially the study of speech acts and social deixis. However, pragmatics has much to contribute to sociolinguistics. In trying to understand the social significance of patterns of language use, Levinson (1983) suggests that it is important to understand the underlying structural properties and processes that constrain verbal interaction.

5.5.Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

The relationship between pragmatics and discourse analysis is such that makes it difficult to really say where one ends and where the other begins or when one explicitly excludes the other. The most popular definition of discourse analysis is given by Brown and Yule (1983) i.e. "….the analysis of language in use…which is not to be restricted to the description of language forms independent of the purpose or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs." Hence, a discourse analyst will describe language forms as they are used in communication but will go further to explain the functions of these forms in real life situations

The last question especially coincides with the concern of pragmatics. The theories of pragmatics which we have discussed so far, attempt to explain how people create meaning and make sense of what is said in specific situations. Speakers are guided by their knowledge of the language system alongside their knowledge of the socio-cultural system, beliefs and traditions and the fact that meaning is not constructed from the formal language of the message alone. Every piece of discourse or conversation gives the speaker an opportunity to apply some pragmatics principles to encode meaning in words that most realise their intention. Both pragmatics and discourse analysis link form to function and this may help language learners to familiarize themselves within a discourse, rather than just the formal structure of a language. Unfortunately most learner concentrate with trying to understand the meaning of every word and their literal meaning. But discourse structure may consist of functional units which only a pragmatic interpretation will help to decode (Cook, 1989).

According to Cook, pragmatics provides us with a means of relating stretches of language to the physical, social, and psychological world in which they take place. While discourse is the totality of all these elements interacting, pragmatics tends only to examine how meaning develops at a given point. It provides us with something like "a snap shot meaning." Discourse is "more like a moving film, revealing itself in time, sometimes over a long time." Discourse is the material upon which we apply pragmatic interpretation. Hence, discourse analysis presumes pragmatics, meaning that a comprehensive discourse analysis, will definitely involve pragmatic interpretation of meanings.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Distinguish between pragmatics and discourse analysis language to the physical, social, and psychological world in which they take place. While discourse is the totality of all these elements interacting, pragmatics tends only to examine how meaning develops at a given point. Discourse analysis presumes pragmatics, meaning that a comprehensive discourse analysis, will involve pragmatic interpretation of meanings.

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6. Doing Pragmatics

6.1. Introduction

Linguistics is often defined as a “scientific study” of language because of the nature of investigation that is involved in the study. Over time, language experts have applied scientific methods such as observation of some phenomena/variables in language use, identification of problems, formulation of some testable hypotheses, collection and analyses of data based on some methodology, presentation of research findings and recommendations based on findings. However, not all pragmaticists view their subject as science although at one point or another, they have had to apply one or more scientific methods. In these last units of the course, we shall be examining some general methods of pragmatic research that you will need to familiarize yourself with and in fact get involved in. Topics that are investigable will be suggested, which means that after this study you should be able to carry out a pragmatic research work on any topic of your choice. These units however, do not intend to delve into extensive theoretical issues/discussions of research methodologies across disciples, rather to give you basic guidelines on how to carry out linguistic investigation, particularly pragmatics which is our main concern here.

Let us consider this scenario: you get to the library and you see a 100 level student (a boy) of English reading a book on politics and it was during the second semester examination. And you say to him: “hello, why don’t you read a book on language?” Then he replies: “it’s because I enjoy reading politics.” You leave him and move on to take your seat. Again you observe another student, this time a 200 level female student of English reading a book on sports. You also say to her: “why don’t you read a book on language?” She looks at you for a while, smiles and drops the book; then she goes to the shelf and picks a book on language and begins to read. You nod in satisfaction because this student understands your indirect speech act, rather than the 100 level student who took your indirect speech act for a direct speech act. You can reasonably begin to imagine that the two different responses you got from the two students from two different levels may suggest some topics that may be turned to testable hypotheses as follows:

 100 level students do not generally understand indirect speech acts 100 level students may show their displeasure to strangers by responding to the propositional content rather than the illocutionary force of utterances, by treating indirect speech act as if they were direct speech acts Not all 100 level students treat indirect speech act as though they were direct speech acts, their responses depends on variables such as age, mood, level of exposure, degree of communicative competence, subject of request etc. When 100 level students do not respond to illocutionary force of indirect speech acts, it is simply a matter of choice and not for lack of pragmatic understanding

Each of these may be investigated, by trying to frame a testable hypothesis. For example, we may hypothesize that 100 level students respond equally (un) cooperatively to indirect and direct requests and then set out to test this hypothesis by designing an experiment in which a sample of 100 level students are selected and made to respond to series of requests, some expressed directly, some indirectly. The data collected from this experiment is then recorded and transcribed, analysed and finding will emerge proving the hypothesis right or that it failed. If it turns out that the 100 level students irrespective of their programmes respond to direct speech act than indirect speech act, this will presumably have implications on the way mature students should address new students. This research might also suggest a follow-up one which should find out whether 100 level students failed to respond to indirect speech because they don’t understand their pragmatic contents or because they don’t generally like to be talked to indirectly. This kind of research is usually referred to as “empirical” because it studies real observable phenomena (Grundy, 2000).

Grundy (2000:219) summarizes the nature of pragmatic investigation as follows:

□ Frame a testable hypothesis (or series of hypotheses) suggested by some observation about the way the world appears to work □ Design an experiment which will enable you to collect data which test this hypothesis □ Collect the data under experimental conditions □ Quantify the data in order to determine whether or not the hypothesis is proved □ Consider the implications of the findings and whether follow-up experiments would be useful

Let me quickly mention here that a “hypothesis” is a tentative statement about relationships that exist between two or among many variables; they are assumptions or conjectural statements about relationships that need to be tested and subsequently accepted or rejected (Asika, 1991). Empirical research often tries to determine whether there is a significant association or not between two variables. For example, you may try to establish whether there is a significant association between level of exposure and understanding of indirect speech acts.

The different positions about how pragmatic research should be carried out have given rise to different approaches especially by the fact that not all aspects of pragmatics could be investigated using the scientific approach described above. As a matter of fact, pragmatic meaning depends very much on inference, which is not a directly observable phenomenon; therefore there are a lot other ways as we shall see in this study that pragmatic investigation may be carried out without the empirical approach.

It is also important to note that identification of a research problem, will generally lead to Research Questions. This often replaces the hypothesis as a guide to data collection and analysis, especially where research does not involve experiments. For instance, in our research about the 100 level students, research questions may be framed as follows:

a. Do all 100 students respond negatively to indirect speech act?
b. What factors are responsible for the negative response of 100 level students to indirect speech acts? Etc.

You will observe that the above approach is associated with spoken discourse, where recording and transcription are necessary. Interestingly, you will also notice that not all spoken discourse demands the kind of scientific approach described above. For example, if you’re doing a pragmatic study of a conversation, you may not need an experiment about how frequent some 100 level students respond to requests; rather you will be concerned with observing the sequential properties of the talk and how interactants take turns and so on. We shall examine some other areas of research as we proceed.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. Outline the first steps to begin a research in pragmatics
2. Explain the term “hypothesis” and why it is important in pragmatic study
3. What do you think is the best approach to pragmatic investigation

6.2.Research Topics

Getting an interesting research topic need not be difficult if you are interested in the study itself. The very first step is to ensure that you are adequately familiar with the area you are trying to study. However being adequately familiar with a particular area of study is not the same thing as getting a researchable topic. A topic must capture the subject of your study. It should be concise and striking. You are usually required to narrow the topic and limit your writing to the topic. It makes it easier for you to include only the relevant information and maintain the required length of the project. Before submitting any topic for approval (if your research is for academic purpose) it is necessary to discuss it with your study group or classmates. You can also consult an expert or your teachers for their opinion. Below are possible subject areas that you may find interesting. They are mere suggestions and by no means restrictive. I have borrowed some of them from Grundy 2000:229.

(i) Study of conversation – especially the structure of turn-taking and other conversational strategies (ii) Structure and Pragmatic properties of seminars, interviews, talk types (e.g. telephone conversation, contributions to radio-phoning programmes, etc) especially investigating how roles are assigned, how expectations are signaled etc. (iii) Focusing on power and distance, how relation is encoded; facework – how speakers and hearers use politeness strategies

(iv) Studies of infants and their recognition and production of pragmatic strategies; the role of pragmatics in enabling first language acquisition (v) Intercultural pragmatics – how members of different cultures accommodate and react to socio-pragmatic differences (vi) Study of contexts: whether external social structure determines how talk is organized and the type of contributions that occur; or is the context created by the talk itself? (vii) Ethno-methodology – providing ethnographic account of the way that talk and life are related. Showing how membership and cultural affiliation are oriented to and have both including and excluding functions (viii) Pragmatic strategies in mass media reporting – showing features of speech acts/implicatures of headlines, editorials, cartoons etc. (ix) Investigating how properties of entailment, implicatures, explicatures, direct/indirect speech and signaled in advertisements, barlines, etc. and their particular effects (x) Literary pragmatics – how writers employ their knowledge of language use to communicate pragmatic information in the context of some particular social groups etc.

As we have noted earlier, topics may be generated from these areas that may lead to an exciting and rewarding experience. Remember that it is always advisable to read round a subject area before deciding on a topic. A good topic is usually a product of an initial research to avoid starting off and get stuck along the way. Some topics may initially appear interesting when in actually fact they are complex for you at your undergraduate level. That's why you need to always consult your supervisor or an experience person to guide you. Having a good researchable topic makes your work a bit easier and enjoyable.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. Outline some fundamental steps to procuring a topic
2. Suggest some areas of study you may want to do research on

6.3.Reading literature

Your "Review of Literature" (or Literature Review) is not the same as "reading round" a subject area. Your review of literature begins after you have read round a subject area as part of your initial research. You must have also got a topic. If you do a serious review of literature on your chosen topic, you will be surprised that a good number of works has been done in that area. This will give you adequate background understanding of your topic, and help you identify the significance of your own study (i.e. your work is likely going to cover an area where previous works have not adequately covered). Generally your review of literature will give you a firsthand understanding of the theoretical background of your topic area. That is why it is always good to begin with early (perhaps classical) account of the study and then the recent, and the most recent works on the topic. Recent works (or publications) in any topic is usually found in current journals of the particular discipline. You are therefore advised not to rely on text-books alone. There are several international journals on the subjects of pragmatics and discourse analysis. You may search the internet for journals such as The Journal of Pragmatics; Pragmatics; Intercultural Pragmatics; Discourse and Society; Discourse Studies; Discourse and Communication; Journal of Politeness Research etc. There are also local academic journals in your library that can be of help to you. When you read, you will notice that authors and researchers would have made statements to explain certain terms, concepts or theories that you might have found difficult in text-books. Some may even refer you to other helpful materials. You may also find certain analytical procedures explained and applied. It is necessary to warn you against the temptation to copy from a source without proper acknowledgement or referencing. Unfortunately some students find similar works to theirs, and all they do is to "dub live" or simply make photocopy of the material and submit as theirs. This is academic fraud that is punishable by law. Avoid this temptation by all means. If you understand what you are reading, you can always put your understanding in your own words and where you must quote or paraphrase you endeavour to acknowledge your source. I'm sure that you must have been taught how to do this in your general study course. Reading literature on your topic demands that you do appropriate note-taking; this will enable you organize your materials and prepare you for the actual writing of the project. Again I'm sure that you are familiar with note-taking techniques. On a final note, if you read enough, you will be able to write enough.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. Why is it necessary to do a review of literature on a subject area before writing a research project?
2. Mention some materials you must read as part of your review of literature

Writing and submitting a well-research project on any topic of your choice is a compulsory graduation requirement for all undergraduate students. Therefore the importance of the procedure for a linguistic research cannot be over emphasized. In this unit, we have attempted to take you through some fundamental first steps to doing a research in pragmatics. We started by giving you a general overview on how to begin and finish an empirical research and then went on to describe some first steps of pragmatic research namely, choosing a topic and doing a review of literature. These are the fundamentals; try to understand and apply them and you will be ready for the next steps in Unit 20.

A research project in pragmatics begins with identifying a researchable topic that will naturally generate some testable hypotheses. Hypotheses are generally used if a research involves some empirical test to generate data. But where research is more of description, research questions are used and then data are procured without experiments. Data are analysed, findings are recorded and conclusions are made based on findings.

A good project is a product is a good researched topic, while a good topic is a product of a sound initial research on an area that is adequately familiar to the researcher. A topic must capture the subject of the study. It should be concise and striking often requiring that it is narrowed and limited to the particular area of interest.

Review of Literature is the extensive reading of materials on the subject area beginning from the old to the most recent literatures on the topic. Previous works will normally answer questions bordering on concepts, theories, arguments, results etc on the topic that will enrich the researcher's understanding of the area of study. Most importantly previous researches will acquaint you with the level of works that has been done in that area and establish the relevance of your own work. Researchers have had to drop their initial topics when in the course of reading they discovered that someone had already done exactly the same work. Reading previous literatures involves reading books, journal articles, media articles etc.

Tutor Assignment

1. Outline some fundamental steps to procuring a topic

2. Why is it necessary to do a review of literature on a subject area before writing a research project?

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7. Doing research

At the end of this part, you should be able to:

1. Describe how to go about collecting data for your project
2. Explain at least one methodology for analyzing your data
3. Mention one theory of pragmatics that you can base your analysis on
4. Discuss how to begin and finish a research project in pragmatics

7.1. Data Collection

If your research is empirical requiring test of a hypothesis like the one that tests how I00 level students respond to indirect speech act, then your data will normally be elicited. In that case you will be careful to design the elicitation experiments to ensure you elicit the kind of response (i.e. the data) that will measure what you are testing. Remember that you must eliminate all irrelevant variable and do not manipulate your data to prove your hypothesis. Very often, good data analyses always prove certain hypothesis wrong. It is necessary that while you are recording a conversation, the participants should not know that they are being recorded; otherwise you may not get a natural conversation. You may need some information about the inter-actants who you may not get in the conversation, thereby requiring you to talk to them individually. In that case, you may have to talk to them and seek their permission to use their conversation for academic purpose. This will take care of an ethical issue that forbids you revealing data provided by informants without their consent. So you have to decide whether to obtain prior consent of your informants before collecting your data, or ask their permission to use data after they have been collect or not to ask permission at all (Grundy, 2000).

Your decision will depend on the circumstances where the data are collected and the kind of conversation involved.

You may be collecting data that requires interviews or questionnaires. You either decide to record the interview and transcribe later or carry out a structured interview where you write down the interviewee's responses. Whether you are collecting data from elicitation method, interview or questionnaire, your raw data is essentially the pattern of naturally occurring language use by speakers in their socio-cultural or institutional contexts that will enable you make some judgements as to whether your hypothesis is right or wrong. Therefore there is no research without available data and it must be presented in the work, either qualitatively or quantitatively (i.e. involving figures, tables, graphs etc.) It is wrong therefore to go on to describe patterns of turn-taking in a conversation or discourse structures of some data without presenting them for us to see. Some students go on to do some "analysis" and then bring in bits of what they call data here and there in the analysis without presenting the data itself first. If you are doing a study of written communication, the parts of the material that serves as your data must be copied out. If they are adverts, news headlines, cartoons, stickers etc. you must endeavour to present the written version of the data and where necessary (as in adverts) original copies should be attached as appendices. Remember that our attention here is language use – that is why it is linguistic research and we are testing how meaning is generated, processed and disseminated in the context of users and situations.

In summary Grundy (2000) gives us some points to note especially if data collection is such that aims at testing some hypotheses:

1. Whenever possible, do a Pilot Collection Exercise so as first to enable you see whether the data you are collecting is audible and transcribable or useful for the purpose you have in mind.

2. Consider whether you need to use all the data or just some part of them. Sometimes excluding any part of the data may render them an incomplete record of speech event recorded.
3. Do not be too ambitious: one hour of conversation involving several speakers can take many days or even weeks to transcribe. So limit the amount of data you set out to collect to what you can practically transcribe and adequately analyze.
4. Ensure that your data contains the information you need. Nothing is more frustrating than to have data which do not really reveal what you had hoped they would or that are difficult to hear and transcribe.

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

1. Explain the term "data" in a pragmatic context
2. Describe some data collection procedures that you know
3. Explain the importance of data to any research work

7.2.Analyzing and Interpreting Data

Analysis is the breaking down and ordering of the data (quantitative information) involving searching for trends and patterns of association and relationships among data or group of them. Interpretation involves the explanation of the associations and relationships found in the data, including inferences and conclusions drawn from these relationships.

Let us assume your research is the activity type investigating the structures and pragmatic properties of seminars/interviews or such that focus on power and distance. You will be required to identify from the data how the speech events are goal oriented and whether they determine their own structures or not; how expectations are signaled, implied and referred to; how talk is constrained and how participants indicate constraints on allowable contributions; how functional roles assumed by a speaker and assigned to another speaker are determined etc. how power and distance are encoded; how speakers and hearers use politeness strategies to acknowledge the face want of others (Grundy, 2000); how properties of discourse perform speech acts, construct identities, reflect societal norms, beliefs or ideologies; how implicatures signal culture-based meaning; etc. Your data is likely to reveal much more depending on how successful your data collection procedure has been.

Your analysis may require that you put certain information in figures or tables or workout some percentages, especially if your research is quantitative arising from an empirical method. Sometimes your analysis may also demand that you identify some analytical categories in which case, you break your analysis into sections or sub-sections. Your analysis must stick to the overall goal of the research and must be able to answer your research questions positively/negatively or prove/disprove your hypotheses.

It is important to mention here that in linguistic (or pragmatic) research; we do not generally edit our data before analysis as is the practice in some disciplines. We may “edit” some wrong figures, involving names or numbers but certainly not the actual discourse samples of respondents. Whatever variety of language use you obtain is very essential even where they are idiosyncratic. What some people call “errors” in language use are indeed indicators of variables that reveal a lot about speakers, their social identities, statuses, beliefs etc. Again I would like to warn against manipulating your data; trying to “correct” what an informant/respondent said. As long as we are testing language habits and how they occur in their natural settings, constructing values, identities, societies; sometimes how these mediate attitudes and perform social actions, we have no choice than to leave the raw data the way it is. Some students have also been found to generate some “data” all by themselves, for instance someone doing a study of bumper stickers and writing some stickers herself in order to complete the number she wants and then coming back to say she collected them from the field. This is absolutely dishonest. Stick to your data and where you have some difficulty in your analysis;

consult your teacher or supervisor. You will notice that this part on doing pragmatics has concentrated on some key issues about linguistic research and do not cover all you need to know about research and its technicalities. It is assumed that you have done a course on research methodology.

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

What does data analysis involve? Give examples

7.3.Methodology

Methodology is about how you intend to do your analysis. If you are applying a scientific method of analysis involving experimentation, transcription of data, analysis of questionnaire etc where your result will demand some figures and statistics, then it is quantitative. If it is descriptive, which involves your own judgment and interpretation of the data based on some inferences etc; then it is qualitative. You will need to state this clearly in your work. Your methodology is usually determined by the theory you adopt in your analysis. If you are investigating patterns of speech acts in news headlines for example, you will need to clearly define and explain the speech acts theory and why you think it is the most appropriate in the study of language use of news headlines. Naturally your analysis will be qualitative method where you will do a descriptive kind of analysis. At your level however, your supervisor will guide you as to how you approach the matter of theory and methodology.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3

1. Explain the term “methodology”.

2. Describe some research methodologies that you know

7.4.Reporting Findings

What you report as your research finding is the actual outcome of your research, not your hypotheses. Some students attempt to force their research questions or hypothesis into their findings whether or not findings justify their hypotheses. As we said earlier, your findings do not have to prove your hypotheses or answer ‘yes’ to your research questions. Your concern is to do your investigations and report your findings objectively. It is your findings that determine your final conclusions and possible recommendations. At this point, the reader will be able to see clearly the contributions your research has made. Always do a thorough citation at the end. Your bibliography must reflect all the materials you have used in the Work.

Self-Assessment Exercise 4

Explain the importance of reporting your findings in a clear and lucid manner.

We can then conclude that pragmatics is a practical exercise that reveals the many dimensions of language use and the various levels of meanings they generate in social contexts. Pragmatics is an exercise in search of meanings. Much of these “meanings” are actually a revelation of ourselves - our intentions and tendencies; our identities, relationships, cultures and beliefs; our hopes, our strengths and our weaknesses. So every effort in pragmatic research provides an opportunity to understand better the nature of language, how it works and what it means to us.

Assignment

1. Explain the term "data" in a pragmatic context. Describe some data collection procedures that you know.

2. What does data analysis involve? Give examples.

References/Further Reading

Levinson, S. (1983) Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Grundy, P. (2000) Doing Pragmatics 2nd Ed. London: Arnold