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(**Major**) Sciences of Language (**Module**) Pragmatics

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**Introduction to Pragmatics**

We all know what light is; but it is not easy to tell what it is.

(Sam Johnson, in Johnson Boswell’s life of Johnson, 11April 1776)

**Outcomes of the Tutorial** : *By the end of this tutorial, you will be able to :*

1. ***Define*** pragmatics
2. ***Outline*** its goals ;
3. ***Distinguish*** *it from other branches of linguistics* ;
4. ***Single*** ***out*** its scopes and field of inquiry.

**Terminology Used This Tutorial :** Linguistics,semantics,syntax,semiotics,pragmatics,pragmatism,context,interaction,language in use, systemacy ,science, meaning speaker meaning. utterance, and proposition.

**Food-for-Thought Questions**

1. What is *pragmatics* ?
2. What are its goals?
3. In what ways does it differ from other branches of linguistics?
4. To what extent can we claim that pragmatics is systematic in its analysis?

**Introduction and Definition**

**1. A brief history of pragmatics**

Although pragmatics is a relatively new branch of linguistics, research on it can be dated back to ancient Greece and Rome where the term ‘pragmaticus’ is found in late Latin and’pragamticos’ in Greek, both meaning of being practical. Modern use and current practice of pragmatics is credited to the influence of the American philosophical doctrine of pragmatism. Pragmatics as a modern branch of linguistic inquiry has its origin in the philosophy of language. Its philososphical roots can be traced back to the work of the philosopher Charles Morris, Rudolf Carnap ,and Charles Peirce in the 1930’s.Influenced by Peirce(1938),for example, Morris presented a threefold division into syntax, semantics and pragmatics within **semiotics**(the theory of signs).According to this typology, **syntax** is the study of the formal relation of one sign with another, **semantics** deals with the relation of signs to what they denote ,and **pragmatics** addresses the relation of signs to their users and interpreters.

**Pragmatics** is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. In this three-part distinction, only pragmatics allows humans into the analysis. The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that one can talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals and the kind of action (for example,requests,apologies)that they are performing when they speak. The big disadvantage is that all these very human concepts are extremely difficult to analyze in a consistent and objective way.

**2. The pragmatics waste basket or the garbage can**

For a long time in the study of language, there has been a very strong interest in formal systems of analysis, often derived from mathematics and logic. The emphasis has been on discovering some of the abstract principles that lie at the very core of language. By placing the investigation of the abstract, potentially universal features of language in the centre of their work tables, linguists and philosophers of language tended to push any notes they had on everyday language use to the edges. As the table got crowded, many of those notes on ordinary language in use began to be knocked off and ended up in the wastebasket. Thus pragmatics was associated with the metaphor of ‘a garbage can’(Leech,1983).That overflowing ‘wastebasket’ or ‘garbage can’ has become the source of much of what will be discussed in pragmatics. It is worth remembering that the contents of the waste basket were not originally organized under a single category. They were defined negatively, as the stuff that was not easily handled within the formal systems of analysis. Some criticisms were that, unlike grammar which resorts to rules, the vague and fuzzy principles in pragmatics are not adequate in telling people what to choose in face of a range of possible meanings for one single utterance in context. Some writers even think that pragmatics is not eligible (qualified) as an independent filed of learning since meaning is already dealt within semantics. However, there is a consensus view that pragmatics as a separate study is more than necessary because it handles those meanings that semantics overlooks (Leech, 1983).

**3. What is pragmatics?**

Pragmatics is a subfield of contemporary linguistics developed in the late 1970’s, pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce a communicative act or speech action in a concrete speech situation which is usually a conversation.

But what is pragmatics? Let us consult some definitions: Although this area originated from semiotics, it was not until the 1970’s that the research field of pragmatics or the study of language in use, came to be regarded as a discipline in its own right this fact took place on the basis of the work of a series of philosophers such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969), and Grice(1975),who developed what was to become a science of language of enormous relevance. Until that, researchers such as Saussure (1959) or Chomsky (1965) had only paid attention to isolated linguistic forms and structures .Both Saussure’s langue and parole from structuralism and Chomsky’s generative tansformational grammar based on the notion of competence and performance merely accounted for an ideal grammatical knowledge shared by native speakers of a given language. Neither of the two linguists took into consideration the notion of real use of language.

Many scholars have provided numerous definitions of this term bearing in mind that the interpretation of words varies according to the specific context in which they are said. According to Alcaraz (1990)and Cenoz (1999),the main characteristics that define pragmatics refer to:

1. The use of language as a means of communication.

2. The importance of language use focussing on functions rather than on forms.

3. The study of the processes that occur in communication.

4. The importance of context and authentic language use.

5. The interdisciplinary nature of pragmatics.

6. The application of linguistic theories based on communicative competence.

Stalnaker (1972) defined pragmatics as “the study of linguistic acts and the contexts in which they are performed”. Levinson (1983) regarded pragmatics as ”the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the context in which they would be appropriate” .In Leech(1983) pragmatics could be defined as the study of the use and meaning of the utterances to their situation. However, we believe that the most elaborate definition was proposed by David Crystal(1985) who defined pragmatics as: **“*the study of language from the point of view of users, especially the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using the language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication”.***

This definition has been exploited by many writers who consider that pragmatics is characterized by the following features:

a. Meaning is created in interaction.

b. Context includes both linguistic and non linguistic aspects.

C .Choices made by the users of Language are important concerns.

d. Constraints in using language in social action (who can say what to whom) are significant.

e. The effects of choices on participant are analyzed.

For the time being, I shall propose a working definition which runs as follows: Pragmatics is the systematic study of meaning by virtue of ,or dependent on the use of language .The central topics of inquiry of pragmatics include implicature, presupposition, speech acts ,deixis, and politeness.

**4. Some basic notions in pragmatics**

So far, we have discussed what pragmatics is. Now, let us turn to some basic notions in pragmatics.

**4.1 Sentence, utterance, proposition and context.**

**a. Sentence:** A well-formed string of words put together according to the grammatical rules of a language. It is an abstract entity or construct defined within the theory of grammar**.**

**b. Utterance:** The use of a particular piece of language – be it a word, a phrase or a sentence, or a sequence of sentences – by a particular speaker on a particular occasion.

**c. Proposition:** It is what is expressed by a sentence when that sentence is used to make a statement, that is, to say something, true or false, about some state of affairs in the external world. Put the other way round, a sentence when uttered to make a statement, is said to convey a proposition.

**d. Context:** Context in broader sense may be defined as referring to any relevant features of the dynamic setting or environment in which a linguistic unit is used. Context can be further divided into three different types. First, there is the physical context, which refers to the physical setting of the utterance that is often called the spatio-temporal location of the utterance. Second, the linguistic context and this refers to the surrounding utterances in the same discourse. Third, there is the general knowledge context which involves a set of background assumptions shared by the speaker and the addressee.

**Quiz**

**Task One:**

**Choose the answer that best suits the information given in this lecture.**

1) Semantics and Pragmatics…

a) study the same phenomena.

b) are both concerned with meaning.

c) both focus on the users of a language.

2) Pragmatics deals with…

a) the truth-conditional meaning of utterances.

b) literal meaning.

c) all kinds of meaning different from the truth-conditional

meaning.

3) One of the central concerns of Pragmatics is…

a) word meaning.

b) politeness.

c) speaker meaning.

4) Pragmatics deals with…

a) the speaker’s communicative intention and the hearer’s

interpretation of it.

b) literal meaning.

c) synonyms.

**Task Two:**

**Are the following Statements true or false ? Write (T) or F) in the space provided.**

1.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Pragmatics and semantics deal with meaning in the same manner.

2.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than said.

3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Pragmatics deals with all the stuff that cannot be handled within the formal systems of analysis.

4.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Pragmatics is interested in formal systems of analysis.

**Task Three: Based on what you already know about pragmatics discuss one of the following issues.(In no more than three hundred words)**

1. Pragmatics studies who said what to whom where when and why.

2. what is context ? Why is it important in pragmatics?