AMERICAN RESEARCH JOURNALS
An Academic Publishing House

Core Concepts in Pragmatics: A Linguistic Study

Adeoye Adeyinka Olushola, PhD[1], Acheoah John Emike, PhD[2]
[1]Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo, Nigeria.
[2]Department of European Languages, Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Kebbi Stae, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

In any field of knowledge, theoretical concepts facilitate the investigation of phenomena. This is the case in language and linguistics, where pragmatics is well established. Pragmatics is the study of context-sensitive use and interpretation of verbal and non-verbal communication. There are different concepts in pragmatics. As research in the field expands, more concepts emerge. Classical pragmatic theories are replete with the discussion of core concepts: speech act, context, presupposition, implicature, shared knowledge, non-verbal communication, etc. In this study, we examine four core concepts in pragmatics: speech act, context, presupposition and implicature. Hinging on Hymes' (1962) Taxonomy of Situation Component, this study concludes that speech act, context, presupposition and implicature are concepts that give readers introductory perspectives on the term "pragmatics", because they elucidate basic communication questions: Who says "what", "where", "how" and "why"?

KEYWORDS: pragmatics, speech act, context, presupposition, implicature, Taxonomy of Situation Components

INTRODUCTION

Human beings cannot survive a communication-bereaved universe. Thus, pragmatics of communication is worthy of scholarly attention. Research in language and linguistics examine front-burner issues, including the explanation of notions, concepts and terminologies that anchor postulations, theories, perspectives and submissions from classical era to contemporary times. This study is an incisive overview of core (critical) concepts in pragmatics. The concepts are critical, considering their functions in communicative events. Presently, we are not aware of any study that deploys a simple, interconnectedness approach to the explanation of core pragmatic concepts; this establishes the significance of the present study. In the elucidation of speech act, context, presupposition and implicature, this study brings classical and contemporary perspectives to the fore.

PRAGMATICS

Yule (1996) defines pragmatics as "the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker and interpreted by a listener or reader." The origin of pragmatics is linked to the Greek *pragma* which means "deed" or "action". Pragmatics emerged as a reaction against formalist approach to language study. Formalism trivializes man's creative potentials in the use of language by emphasizing "linguistic competence" to the detriment of "communicative competence". According to the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1994), pragmatics is "the subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is processed for communication purposes." In addition, Crystal and Varley (1993) define pragmatics as "the study of the factors that govern our choice of language (sounds, construction, words) in social interaction, and the effects of our choice upon others ..." For Kempson (1986), pragmatics is "the study of the general cognitive principles involved in the retrieval of information from an utterance." Austin (1962) submits that crucial concepts in pragmatics include:

- participants (users of language in context);

- speech acts (locutionary act which is an utterance with determinate sense and reference; illocutionary act which is the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and perlocutionary act which is the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence);

- context (the relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance or discourse);

- non-verbal communication (extra-linguistic communication);

- inference (the process of making logical conclusions from all that a particular context provides to arrive at what a speaker means);

- presupposition (facts that the participants of discourse take for granted in a particular context of communication); and

- shared knowledge (common background information shared by the participants of discourse).

For more insights on pragmatics, see Levinson (1983), Searle (1969), Grice (1975), Bach and Harnish (1979), Adegbija (1982), Mey (2001) and Acheoah (2015).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Taxonomy of Situation Components

The core concepts of pragmatics examined in this study interact with the context or situation of human communication. For this reason, Hymes' (ibid.) Taxonomy of Situation Component suitably anchors this study. In this study, the theory is not deployed for textual analysis; its basis is to establish a rationale for arguing that speech act, context, presupposition and implicature are indeed, core concepts in pragmatics. The theory presents the acronym of SPEAKING (communication) as follows:

Setting and Scene: This refers to the general physical circumstances in which the communication event takes place including the time, period, place, weather conditions and cultural views of the setting.

Participants: This describes the status, roles and relationship between sender/addresser ... The speaker-hearer denotes participants in both speech event and non-fictional writing (i.e., real author and real reader), addresser denotes the implied reader of fictional texts.

Ends: This refers to outcomes of speech act, which can be classified into (i) results-intended and/or unintended, and (ii) goals – the individuals and/or general.

Act Sequence: This refers to the form and content of the message of text: how and what is said, 'words' and 'the topic'.

Key: This describes the manner in which a textual message is conveyed, e.g. the lecture might be delivered in precise way or perhaps in a light-hearted way.

Instrumentalities: These are the channels employed in communication and the forms of speech e,g. telephone, telegram, face-to-face, Email, etc.

Norms: This refers to conventions or rules of social and speech behaviors: linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic conventions may be universal or may be specific to culture of participants

Genre: Genres are categories which can be fairly identified through the linguistic forms they typically employ e.g. poem, letter, story, etc."

CORE CONCEPTS IN PRAGMATICS

Speech Act

An action that is contextually performed with language is known as "speech act". Speech acts include: giving orders, advising, acknowledging, condemning, apologizing, persuading, informing, etc. Alston, cited in David A. Brenders (1982) submits that "the correct unit of analysis for meaning is not at the level of words since, referring or denoting is something one does in the course of performing a larger action-unit, such as making a request, admission, or prediction." Austin (ibid.) establishes three broad categories of speech acts: locutionary act (performing an act OF saying something); illocutionary act (performing an act IN saying something); and perlocutionary act (performing an act BY saying something). Searle, cited in Brenders (ibid.) opines that "in the performance of an illocutionary act the speaker intends to produce a certain effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect, and furthermore, if he is using words literally, he intends this recognition to be achieved ..." It is instructive that as noted by Austin (ibid.), speech acts can be performed by using a non-performative formula. Perspectives on speech act, as evident in different speech act theories, facilitate the analysis of language use across genres. Pratt (1977) contends that "speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants ... rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received." Speech acts are acts deployed from encoders to decoders with targeted intentions. This explains why the meaning conveyed in any sentence is essentially its speech-act potential. However, the claim that "speech acts can be performed without using sentences" is popular; scholars of pragmatics align with Austin (ibid.) who is at the fore of the view that speech acts can be performed with a non-performative formula. For example, Davis Steven (2002, p. 136) opines that "expressing a speech act as a performative or non-performative utterance is not just optional; it is often the case that impressibility via a performative utterance is simply not given as an option."

Language users expect their utterances to achieve illocutionary goals. Thus, speech acts are not to be useless from speaker-end. It is worthy of note that while an illocutionary act has conventional expectations from language users, its effect on addressees are not predictable. For this reason, Levinson (ibid.) submits that "illocutionary act is what is directly achieved by the conventional force associated with the issuance of a certain kind of utterance in accordance with a conventional procedure, and is consequently determinate (in principle at least). In contrast, a perlocutionary act is therefore not conventionally achieved just by uttering that particular utterance, and includes all those effects intended or unintended often indeterminate, that some particular utterance in a particular situation may cause. While one would like to be able to identify the perlocutionary effects with the consequences of what has been said, illocutionary acts too have direct and in-built consequences – there is the issue of "uptake" (including the understanding of both the force and the content of the utterance by its addressee(s))."

A study of speech act as a core concept in pragmatics, should not ignore the notion of "uptake" (hearers' understanding of an illocutionary act).

Speech acts are widely discussed in the literature of pragmatics from the perspective of "doing" (action)[1].

Context

Context is a pragmatic variable that determines the use and interpretation of verbal and non-verbal communication. Scholars of pragmatics evolve different types of contexts. Adegbija (1999, p. 192) submits that "broadly, we may identify at least four types of context as impinging on utterance interpretation: the physical, the socio-cultural, the linguistic, and the psychological. Pertinent questions for probing into the context include the following:

Did the communicative exchange occur at night, in the morning, twenty years ago, at a church, at a mosque, in a bedroom, in the market, at a cemetery, at a hospital? Socio-culturally, one may ask questions such as these: what are the beliefs, habits, value systems, or cultures of those involved? Are their religious and cultural beliefs at hand? Linguistically, what are the other words appearing in the environment of the word used? What do they mean? What do they imply within the physical and socio-cultural setting? Psychologically, what is the state of mind of those involved in the interaction?"

Language users use language not just at a place, but also at specific time or period. This view corroborates van Dijk T. A. (1977, p. 26) who asserts that "the actual context is defined by the period of time and the place where the common activities of speaker and hearer are realized and which satisfy the properties of 'here' and 'now' logically, physically and cognitively." It is usually the case, that context captures socially constructed components in communication events: the discourse, rather that the text. It is misleading to think of context as a constant concept in pragmatics. Context continually changes, and participants of discourse are usually are of changing contexts. Commenting on the dynamic nature of human communication, Acheoah (ibid.) posits that discourse has an Emergent Context (EC) which is super-imposed on on-going communication, and becomes Shared Knowledge of Emergent Context (SKEC) when it becomes known and understood by the participants. An Emergent Context relocates illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Context links crucial concepts in pragmatics as it is the basis for the emergence of pragmatics. According to Labove (1972, p. 297), "no use of language can be divorced from its social context since special meaning is parasitic upon language."

Presupposition

Language users are aware of a wide range of beliefs about their immediate and remote environment (the universe of discourse). Such beliefs are readily presupposed for hitch-free communication in terms of encoding and decoding utterances. Presupposition is any background assumptions that are commonly known by participants of discourse.

Whether such assumptions are true or not, they impinge on on-going communication. Wodak (2007, p. 213) notes that "the concept of presupposition is central to linguistics. The analysis of presuppositions within speech act theory … makes it possible to make explicit the implicit assumptions and intertextual relations that underlie text-production." Communicative intentions of speakers are immersed in presupposed elements. Without presuppositions, speakers cannot appropriately use sentences in contexts. Studies contend that presuppositions can either be attached or detached from linguistic stretches, based on sentence variation (clause-structure variation). Yule, cited in Rita Bossan (2018, pp. 70-71) identifies six forms of presuppositions:

1. Existential Presupposition:

This has to do with entities named by the speaker and assumed to be present. When we name an object, it is presupposed that the object exists. All nouns are presuppositions e.g. Simba's car is new.

2. Factive Presupposition:

It is the assumption that something is true due to the presence of some verbs such as know and realize. For example, when a teacher says that he didn't realize someone has failed the exam, we can suppose that someone has failed the exam.

3. Lexical Presupposition:

It is the assumption that, in using one word, the speaker can act as if another meaning (word) will be understood. Example:

o Clara stopped smoking (She used to smoke).

o You are pregnant again (You were pregnant before).

The use of the expression "stop" and "again" are taken to presuppose another (unstated) concept.

4. Structural Presupposition:

This is the assumption associated with the use of certain words and phrases. WH-questions in English (e.g. when and where) are conventionally interpreted with the presupposition that the information after the Wh-form is already known to be the case. Examples:

o When did she leave home? (She left.)

o Where did you get the information? (You got the information.)

5. Non-factive Presupposition:

It is an assumption that something is not true. For example, verbs like "imagine", "pretend" and "dream" are used with the presupposition that what follows is not true.

o I dreamt that I got married (I am not married).

o We imagined that we were Americans (We are not Americans).

6.   Counterfactual Presupposition:

It is the assumption that what is presupposed is not only untrue, but is the opposite of what is true or contrary to facts."

The above typology of presupposition reveals that as interconnected pragmatic concepts, speech act and implicature have immensely been used in presupposition theorizing.

Propositions that participants of discourse encode and decode are socially realistic phenomena. This is why they invoke presuppositions appropriately, when language is used and interpreted.

Implicature

Implied (covert) meanings of utterances are implicatures. As part of communicative competence, speakers sometimes use implied meanings in sentences; it constitutes communicative competence. Acheoah (ibid.) evolves categories of implicatures with discrete functions in communicative events:

(i) Linguistic implicature (LI): It is any meaning implied through language;

(ii) Behavioural Implicature (BI) In communicative situations, there are meanings implied through extra-linguistic and psychological acts. Within the framework of the Pragma-crafting Theory, such meanings are referred to as Behavioural Implicatures.

(iii) Geoimplicature: Coined from "geographical" and "implicature", the term "Geoimplicature" (GI) refers to verbal and non-verbal practices that are restricted to race and geographical (physical) boundary; they are not universal human behaviour.

Adegbija (1999, p. 194) submits that an "implicature is what is suggested or meant, as distinct from what is literally or overtly stated. It has to be inferred or worked out. The working out of an implicature is crucially dependent on the awareness of the speaker and the hearer of the presupposition of the context of interaction. It is a sophisticated inferential procedure that is possible only through an understanding of the presupposition of a situation of social interaction." For Grundy (2008), "an implicature is an indirective reference, a probabilistic conclusion derived from a set of contextual information as it appears relevant. Because indicative references are probabilistic, they may not always correspond to the meaning a speaker seeks to convey." The interaction between implicatures and the grammar of language is a front-burner discourse; for example, there are studies on scaler implicatures. Anna Papafragou and Julien Musolino (2001, p. 1) note that "scalar implicatures arise in examples like *Some professors are famous* where the speaker's use of *some* typically indicates that s/he had reason not to use more informative term, e.g. *all. Some professors are famous* therefore gives rise to the implicature that not all professors

are famous. Recent studies on the development of pragmatics suggest that preschool children are often insensitive to such implicatures when they interpret scalar terms (Noveck 2001 for terms like *might* and *some*, Chierchi, Crain, Guasti, Gualmini and Meroni 2001 for *or*). This conclusion raises two important questions: a) are all scalar terms treated in the same way by young children? And b) does the child's difficulty reflect a genuine inability to derive scalar implicatures or is it due to demands imposed by the experimental task on an otherwise pragmatically savvy child?" Pragmatic theorists explore insights from scalar implicature to postulate on research phenomena that are immersed in inference-making. Thus, there are neo-Gricean or post-Gricean perspectives on implicatures. Anna Papafragou and Julien Musolino (ibid., p. 4) reports that "few studies have attempted to address the psychology of implicature (see e.g. Clark 1992, Gibbs 1994, Cacciari and Glucksberg 1994) and only recently have scalar terms attracted experimental attention (Noveck 2001). These studies have offered support for the intuition that implicatures play a central part in mature verbal communication. Some of the most interesting evidence comes from reasoning studies ... which show how the presence of scalar implicatures disrupts the expected performance of subjects in standard logical tasks." Implicature theorizing is vital in the study of language use, because speakers do not restrict themselves to the use of literal propositions[2]. In pragmatics, implicature establishes logical rationale for inference-making from decoder-end.

CONCLUSION

This study examines core concepts in implicature: speech act, context, presupposition and implicature. In pragmatics, core concepts are the instruments for working out the topic relevance of linguistic stretches. Processing the meaning of an utterance therefore involves working out its topic relevance. The speaker is expected to make utterances "easy to mean". See Sperber and Wilson (1986) for the meaning of the term "topic relevance". To understand the interconnectedness that speech act, context, presupposition and implicature have in communicative events, the use of indirect speech acts is instructive. To understand meanings conveyed at the layer of indirectness, core concepts in pragmatics are explored. According to Searle (1979), "indirect speech act belongs to a higher level of pragmatic meaning. The meaning in indirect speech act is not explicit, and it requires pragmatic elements such as context, mutual contextual beliefs (MCBs) and world knowledge to bring out its meaning." Decoders with cognitive maturity can invoke the necessary pragmatic nuances to locate the illocutionary-force difference of an utterance when it is compared with its conventionally associative force[3]. The concepts examined in this study are operationally interconnected because using one of the concepts to achieve effective communication presupposes deploying the semantics of the others. By being able to answer classical communication questions (in terms of "who" is speaking, "why" the person is speaking, "how" the

person is speaking and "where" the person is speaking), core concepts in pragmatics are inevitably the pillars of the field (of language study).

Being context-sensitive, language use inevitably conveys speaker-hearer meanings. In this study, speech act, context, presupposition and implicature are overviewed in terms of their communicative relevance in written and spoken discourses. The study is crucial, given the fact that the "substance" in communication is not the physical properties of language (words and stretches), but the discrete actions that are evidently deployed in varied contexts and situations. Speech act, context, presupposition and implicature are so crucial in the literature of pragmatics that theories of pragmatics should examine them. As core concepts in pragmatics, speech act, context, presupposition and implicature form the logical bases for explaining language use as having extra-linguistic underpinnings which determine its interpretation.

Notes

[1.] Searle (1976) proposes that there are just five kinds of actions that one can perform in speaking, by means of the following five types of utterances:

(i) Representative, which commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.);

(ii) Directives, which are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning);

(iii) Commissives, which commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering);

(iv) Expressives, which express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating);

(v) Declarations, which effect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and which tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment)."

[2.] In this regard, Bach and Harnish Speech Act Schemata is instructive.

[3.] This implies that although language has structure (formal properties), language users can deviate from normative use to principle-governed use (speaker-based function of language).

REFERENCES

1. Acheoah, J. E. (2015). The Pragma-crafting Theory: A Proposed Theoretical Framework for Pragmatic Analysis. *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, 1(2), 21-32.

2. Adegbija, E. F. (1982). A Speech Act Analysis of Consumer Advertisements. USA: Indiana University. Ph D Dissertation.

3. Adegbija, E. F. (Ed.) (1999). *The English Language and Literature in English: An Introductory Handbook*. Ilorin: University of Ilorin.

4. Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

5. Bossan, R. (2018). History and Scope of Pragmatics. In O. Ibileye (Ed.), *Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics: Issues in Theory and Practice*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.

6. Brenders, D. A. (1982). Fallacies in the Coordinated Management of Meaning: A Philosophy of Language Critique of the Heirachical Organaization of Coherent Conversation and Related Theory. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73:329-348.

7. Crystal, D. & Valey, R. (1993). *Introduction to Languages*. London: Whurr Publishers.

8. Davis, S. (2002).Utterance acts and speech acts. In D. Vanderveken & S. Kubo (Eds.), *Essays inSpeech Act Theory* (pp. 135-150). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

9. *Encyclopedia Americanavol. 22*. (1994). (p. 514). New York: Americana Group Ltd.

10. *Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In Cole and Morgan. (eds.)*

11. Grundy, P. (2008). *Doing Pragmatics*. London: Holder Education.

12. Hymes, D. (1962). The Ethnography of Speaking. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Language.* The Hague: Mouton.

13. Kempson, R. (1977). *Semantic Theory.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

14. Labov, W. (1972). *The Study of Language in Its Social Context*. Ed. Pier Paolo

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

16. Papafragou A. and Musolino J. (2001). Scalar Implicatures: Experiments at the Semantics-

17. Pragmatics Interface. *IRC Technical Reports Series*. 29.

18. Mey, J. (2001). *An Introduction to Pragmatics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

19. Pratt, M. (1977). *Towards a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

20. Searle, J. (1976). *Expression and Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

21. Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

22. Sperber, D. & Wilson, D., *Relevance, Communication and Cognition*, United Kingdom, Blackwell Publishing, (1986)

23. Van, Dijk T. A. (1977). *Text and Context.* London: Longman Group Ltd.

24. Wodak, R. (2007). Pragmatics and Critical Discourse Analysis: A Cross-Disciplinary Inquiry. *Pragmatics and Cognition, 15*(1), 203-225.