



The Pragmatics of Discourse

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Abstract

Doing discourse analysis entails doing syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Contrary to the two levels of language analysis which concentrate, respectively, on the constituent structure of sentences, syntax, and on the meaning that comes from linguistic knowledge, semantics, pragmatics focuses on the aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by only linguistic knowledge which means it also considers the physical and social world (Peccei, 1999). However, English as a foreign language students do not distinguish between pragmatic analysis and semantic analysis. The aim of this paper is to shed light on the distinction between pragmatic analysis and semantic analysis. This research was handled at the department of English language at University of Ghardaia. Sixty second year Licence students were involved in this study. The main tool for collecting data was a test about extracting both pragmatic and semantic analyses of the sentences, and a qualitative approach was selected, in the main, to analyse the obtained data. The findings revealed that the majority of students failed to detect both the semantic and pragmatic meanings of the sentences, which reflected the lack of comprehension and distinction between the two meanings and the inability to read at the deep level. Some recommendations were suggested.

Keywords: Meaning, Linguistics, Pragmatics, Pragmatic analysis, Semantics, Semantic analysis, Discourse Analysis, Discourse, Context.

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1. Introduction

Analysing discourse has focused not only on the internal structure of sentences in terms of order and sequence, but it extended to the relationship between words and the language users (Brown & Yule, 1983). In short, there have been three levels of language analysis: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Syntactic analysis focuses on the constituent structure of sentences. In other words, it studies the relationship between the linguistic forms, words, the way they are organized in sequences and which sequences are considered as well-formed. It should be noted that this analysis does not consider any world of reference or any user of those forms. Semantics, on the other hand, studies the relationship between linguistic forms, words, and their entities, things, in the world—the literal meaning. Pragmatics, contrary to semantics, studies the relationship between linguistic forms, words, and the user of those forms. Many students use semantics and pragmatics interchangeably though there is a clear distinction between the two. To this end, the point focus of this paper is to shed light on the distinction between the two disciplines while highlighting any relationship between the two with much focus on pragmatics and pragmatic meaning.

I. Pragmatics and its Components

Doing discourse analysis certainly entails doing syntax and semantics, but it consists, in the main, of doing pragmatics (Kouti, 2022). To this end, pragmatics has been given much attention,

and a great body of research has studied and focused on pragmatics. Many scholars have suggested different definitions to 'pragmatics'. To begin, pragmatics is about what is inferred from any message in a specific context (Kouti, 2023). As mentioned above, pragmatics differs from syntax and semantics, for the latter do not take the user of the forms into consideration. While the first studies the relationship between linguistic forms, the way they are arranged in sequences, and which sequences are well-formed, the second, semantics, is concerned with the relationship between linguistic forms and entities in the world. Leech (1981) stated that pragmatics studies the relationship between linguistic forms and expressions and their users. This definition does not differ from the one of Yule (1996a). Two years later, he mentioned that pragmatics is "the study of meaning in relation to speech situations" (Leech, 1983, p. 6). Nonetheless, Yule (ibid) went further explaining that pragmatics is the study of the meaning intended by a writer/speaker and that communicated meaning is 'invisible'. He stated clearly that pragmatics is "the study of 'invisible' meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said (or written)" (p. 127). Cook (2003) maintained that the main concern of pragmatics is what a speaker intends to do with words and not the literal meaning. All the above definitions focus on the same idea that pragmatics studies the relationship between the linguistic forms and expressions and their users.

As aforementioned, foreign language students of English are often confused and unable to distinguish between 'pragmatic meaning' and 'semantic meaning'; therefore, it is worth making a detailed account of the distinction and relationship between the two, pragmatics and semantics.

Pragmatics includes a number of components. These are entailment, presupposition, reference, inference and implicature. Some of pragmatics components can be applied to spoken discourse as well as written discourse, namely inference, while other ones are most of the time related to spoken discourse.

Entailment refers to the relationship between two statements when for one to be true, the other must also be true; that is, the relationship between sentences that forms the basis for inferences. According to Peccei (1999), entailments are 'inferences that can be drawn solely from our knowledge about the semantic relationships in a language' (p. 14). There is an exercise extracted from Peccei (ibid), as follows:

Pretend that you have just arrived from another planet. You have learned the vocabulary and grammar of English, but you have never visited Earth before, nor have you ever met or spoken to another Earthling. As is the custom on your planet, you interpret everything you hear literally. Your job is to decide whether each of my following statements is true or false and why.

1. My mother is a woman.
2. My mother is a doctor.
3. The tiger is unhappy.
4. The tiger is an animal.
5. My mother is a boy.
6. The tiger is a reptile.

As noticed, sentences 1 and 4 are true based on English language knowledge; there is a meaning relationship between the words mother/woman and tiger/animal. This type of sentence is referred to as 'analytic sentence'. Accordingly, you are going to answer 'false' to sentences 5 and 6 because of the words 'mother' and 'boy' and 'tiger' and 'reptile' that make those sentences 'contradictions'. The remaining sentences, namely 2 and 3 may or may not be true as this cannot be verified by looking up a dictionary but to non-linguistic information about 'my mother' and the particular 'tiger' you are referring to. This type of sentences is sometimes called 'synthetic sentence'. If 'my mother' is actually a doctor or if 'the tiger' is really unhappy, the sentences are said to be 'synthetically true' which means that their 'truth' are related to the

external world. Contrariwise, if 'my mother' is an engineer, not a doctor, and the tiger is happy or quite happy, we could say that the sentences are 'synthetically false'.

Now, let us consider the following examples of pairs of sentences:

1. (a) Lina caught a trout.
1. (b) Lina caught a fish.
2. (a). Lina is fat.
2. (b) Lina is not thin.
3. (a) Lina baked a cake.
3. (b) Lina baked something.

Following what has been mentioned earlier, all (b) sentences above are synthetically true because there are meaning relationships between trout/fish, fat/thin and cake/something. Thus, sentence (b) is an *entailment* of sentence (a). This means that when the original sentence (a) is true, sentence (b) is automatically true. We could say that this kind of inference, entailment, is for free as it demands a knowledge of semantics of the language being used.

Reference refers to the linguistic forms that a writer uses to enable readers to identify something while reading (Kouti, 2023). According to Yule (1996a), these linguistic forms are called referring expressions and consist of proper nouns (e.g. Malek Bennabi), noun phrases which include definite articles (e.g. the camera) or indefinite articles (e.g. a fruit) and pronouns (e.g. they, our). Some researchers such as Brown and Yule (1983) claimed that reference is an action made by the writer/speaker.

The use of referring expression depends on what the speaker assumes the listener to know. For example, in shared visual contexts, it is sufficient to use deictic expressions such as "It's here" (Yule, 1996b). Nonetheless, these referential expressions are found, mainly, in spoken discourse. Nonetheless, as Brown and Yule (*ibid*) pointed out, unskilled readers may use deictic expressions to understand a text.

Brown and Yule (*ibid*) provided an example which is an extract from a conversation.

A: my uncle's coming home from Canada on Sunday + he's due in +

B: how long has he been away for or has he just been away?

A: Oh no they lived in Canada eh he was married to my mother's sister + + well she's been dead for a number of years now + (p. 28)

From above, speaker A uses *my uncle* and *he* for referring to the same person and *she* and *my mother's sister* to another one.

In sum, reference is related to the speaker's goal and belief in using language (In Kouti, *ibid*). In order to be successful in occurrence, reference should be accompanied by inference.

Inference is any additional information used by the reader to match what is written to what is meant and communicated to identify the hidden meaning (Kouti, 2023). The same applies to a listener connecting what is said to what must be meant (Yule, 1996a). Put simply, inference occurs when there is no connection between words and entities.

Brown and Yule (1983) stated that in reading, for example, and as mentioned earlier, an inference refers to the ability of a reader to infer, detect, the covert meaning of the writer from the literal meaning of words.

Brown & Yule (*ibid*) pointed out that most readers infer from:

- John was in his way to school (p. 34),
that John is a schoolboy.

Besides, when they read the following of the above sentence:

"Last week he had been unable to control the class" (p. 34),

They, readers, alter their inference to, for instance, "John is a schoolteacher".

This means that this type of inference necessitates the reliance on socio-cultural knowledge in for making sense of the sentence.

A presupposition is described by Yule (1996a) as what a speaker assumes to be true or known by a hearer. In fact, he defined presupposition as “a relationship between two propositions” (Yule, 1996b, p. 26). If someone tells you, “Your brother is waiting for you outside”, it means that there is a presupposition that you have a brother. Brown and Yule (1983) pointed out that speaker A views, for example, the information that she has an uncle to be presupposed and that B’s question shows that she ‘has accepted this presupposition’ (p. 29). In the same way, Portner (2006) claimed that the sentence “John is crying again.” (p. 158) presupposes that John has already cried. He maintained that presuppositions occur based on the choice of words by the speakers that they take for granted. In this case, and from above, ‘again’ implies that the speaker took for granted that something being talked about now has already occurred. Also, according to Renkema (2004), in reading, a reader can infer information that is not explicit in discourse.

The term implicature refers to an additional conveyed meaning. It was used by Grice (1975) to reflect what the speaker/writer means through his/her literal production. As such, implicature, one can say, facilitates the creation of pragmatic meaning without the reliance on the code only. The term implicature is generally accompanied by the term ‘cooperative principle’ which will be described next.

Grice (ibid) introduced the notion of cooperative principle or maxims of cooperation. He stated the following: “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purposes or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (ibid, pp. 45-46 in McCabe, 2011, p. 21). In this quotation, Grice is not telling what to do but explaining how to behave in communicative situations and how to assume others behave. Here is an example:

A: Are John and Mary back together again?

B: I saw a red Porsche parked outside 1128 Green Street last night ... and it was still there this morning.

At the beginning, it seems that B has not provided A with a Yes or No answer; nevertheless, B has provided A with the requested information as he has made the connection between the question the answer relying on presupposition. That is, B presupposes that A knows that John has a red Porsche and that Mary lives at 1128 Green Street. Implicitly, John and Mary are back together; therefore, B’s answer is ‘yes’.

Whatever the scenario is, in conversation, people are assumed to adhere to the Cooperative Principle suggested by Paul Grice in 1975.

Widdowson (1996) stated the following:

A major concern of pragmatics is how discourse is managed, what the ground rules for negotiation are, and how (and how far) the different parties cooperate in this joint enterprise. Clearly, when people seek to communicate, they enter into a kind of contract that they will work towards some convergence of intention and interpretation, that is to say, they subscribe to a cooperative principle... Cooperation does not preclude conflict. Indeed, it is only by subscribing to the cooperative principle that people can express disagreement or create conflictual situations’ (p. 66).

Consequently, the participants in any type of communication share common ground rules. The participants adhere to four maxims. Grice (ibid) argued that these maxims are as follows:

Quantity:

Maxim 1: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Maxim 2: Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Relation:

Maxim 1: Be relevant.

Manner: Be perspicuous.

Quality:

Maxim 1: Do not say what you believe to be false.

Maxim 2: Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

Manner:

Maxim 1: Avoid obscurity of expression.

Maxim 2: Avoid ambiguity.

Maxim 3: Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

Maxim 4: Be orderly.

Any success in a conversation depends the cooperation between interlocutors. Look at the following examples that illustrate each maxim:

1. A: What time is it?
B: Twenty-five past five (Maxim of quantity adhered to)
2. A: What would you like?
B: 2 pounds of salmon, please. (Maxim of quality adhered to)
3. A: How about your exam?
B: I passed it. (Maxim of relation adhered to)

Those maxims are found not only in conversations, but also in writing. Furthermore, they do not form rules that should be followed, but rather assumptions which we use to comprehend what people, writers or speakers, mean.

II. Pragmatics vs Semantics

Pragmatics and semantics are the ‘two main areas’ of linguistic study that consider the knowledge we use to pick out meaning when we read or hear and also to convey meaning when we write or speak. Despite the fact that ‘semantics’ focuses on meaning that comes from linguistic knowledge, and pragmatics focuses on the aspects of meaning that cannot predicted by linguistic knowledge alone, the dividing line between both disciplines is debatable.

Leech (1981) mentioned that there has been a debate on the distinction between ‘semantics’ and ‘pragmatics’ and that the interest in pragmatics appeared due to the influence of language philosophers, namely J.L. Austin, J.R. Searle and H. P. Grice, each having a pragmatic approach to meaning. This debate accompanied, too, challenges in linguistics in terms of the assumption that ‘competence’ can be studied separately from ‘performance’, and formal language theories such as transformational generative grammar received a strong reaction. According to the literature, pragmatics has now become one of the strongest areas of linguistic research.

➤ Semantic Meaning Versus Pragmatic Meaning

Following the distinction between pragmatics and semantics, two kinds of analyses are found according to Peccei (1999): ‘pragmatic analysis’ and ‘semantic analysis’(‘pragmatic meaning’ versus ‘semantic meaning’).

Semantic analysis can be achieved in a number of ways, as follows:

1. Provide the meaning of individual words.

For example, the sentence: “Cats drink milk.” can be said, as follows:

Domestic felines consume the liquid fat of milk.

This means we have provided the meanings of the words cats (domestic felines), drink (consume liquid) and cream (the liquid fat of milk). This kind of meaning is the focus of the area of semantics called “Lexical Semantics”.

2. Provide another sentence having the same meaning, a paraphrase.

For example, the sentence: ‘Cats drink milk.’ can be paraphrased in three ways, as follows:

a) Change individual words:

Domestic felines consume the liquid fat of milk.

b) Change the sentence structure:

Here, you can change the sentence into the passive voice, and you will have the following sentence: Cream is drunk by cats.

c) Change both the individual words and the sentence structure.

The liquid fat of milk is drunk by domestic felines.

This analysis that was carried out is the focus of "Sentence Semantics". Therefore, in order to provide a paraphrase, the language user utilises his knowledge of the individual words and the knowledge of English grammar.

It should be noted that word order is important for sentence meaning in English. Consider the following sentences:

- Cats chase mice.

- Mice chase cats.

Though both sentences contain the same words, the meaning of the two sentences is completely different.

Pragmatic analysis focuses on the meaning of a speaker's utterances but not on the meaning of words and sentences. To this end, Peccei (1999) suggested the following example and situation:

Mike, Annie and Mike's cat, Felix, are in Mike's kitchen. What did Annie mean?

Mike : What happened to that bowl of cream ?

Annie : Cats drink cream.

In this example, providing meanings for individual words or even sentences is not sufficient. In fact, we are concerned also with what a person means. This is the area of pragmatics that needs another meaning to meaning.

In the example above, Annie is not only telling that cream is drunk by cats, but she is also accusing Felix, the cat, of having drunk the cream.

Annie's answer 'Cats drink milk' can be paraphrased in two ways:

- The first paraphrase is the semantic paraphrase (SP) which is '*Domestic felines (cats) consume the liquid fat of milk (cream).*'
- The second paraphrase is the pragmatic paraphrase (PP) which is '*Felix probably drank the cream.*'

From above, the paraphrases are totally different as the pragmatic meaning of what a particular speaker means is different from semantic meaning or the literal meaning of the utterance of the speaker.

III. Methodology

Since this study is based on a test, a qualitative analysis, in the main, has been selected to suit its type and objective.

- The Sample

The sample includes sixty Licence students from a population of 90. These students were taught by the researcher. In fact, they were enrolled in a Licence degree in English language at the department of English Language, University of Ghardaia, Algeria.

- **Linguistics Module**

In second year Licence, students in the module of Linguistics review microlinguistics, linguistics schools and pragmatics and discourse analysis. To this end, they are introduced to the concepts of pragmatics and discourse analysis in which they study pragmatics, discourse, shared knowledge, the importance of context and so on. That is, they should identify the elements of discourse and try to figure out how the discourse hearer or reader can detect the meaning communicated via the words of the discourse producer, whether it be author or speaker.

- **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, the researcher has the role of teacher, corrector and data analyser. The researcher analysed the extent to which students can detect the pragmatic meaning and distinguish it from the semantic one through reading and considering the students' answers.

- **Instrument**

After having finished studying semantics, students were tested in order to verify their comprehension of the semantic meaning through what the second participants in conversations say; besides, they were required to provide pragmatic meanings to the same utterances. In fact, in the module of linguistics and in pragmatics, in the main, they study how to analyse various types of discourse, spoken and written, and how to decipher the pragmatic meaning. It is worth mentioning that the examples in the test were conversations and utterances extracted from Peccei (1999).

- **Method of Data Collection**

In order to achieve its objective, this study utilised an exercise taken from Peccei (1999) where the students were asked to provide a semantic meaning / paraphrase (SP) and a pragmatic meaning /paraphrase (PP) for the utterance '**It's cold in here**' in three different situations, as follows:

- a. Mike and Annie are in the living room. Mike asks Annie whether she'd like to eat dinner in the living room or the kitchen.
Annie replies: **It's cold in here.**
- b. The Queen and her butler, James, are in the drawing room.
The Queens says: **It's cold in here.**
- c. Mike and Annie are in the greenhouse. Mike wonders why his orchids haven't bloomed.
Annie replies: **It's cold in here.**

- **Method of Data Analysis**

Since this study is based on a test, a qualitative analysis has been selected to suit this research's type and objective.

After collecting and correcting the papers, the results revealed the following.

Situation (a):

Semantic Meaning

Semantic Paraphrase	Number	Percentage
Correct answer	20	33.33 %
Incorrect answer	40	66.66 %
Total	60	100%

Pragmatic Meaning

	Number	Percentage
Correct	10	16.66 %
Incorrect	50	83.33 %
Total	60	100%

Situation (b) Semantic Meaning

Semantic Paraphrase	Number	Percentage
Correct answer	20	33.33 %
Incorrect answer	40	66.66 %
Total	60	100%

Pragmatic Meaning

Response	Number	Percentage
Correct Answer	10	16.66 %
Incorrect answer	50	83.33%
Total	60	100%

Situation (c) Semantic Meaning

Semantic Paraphrase	Number	Percentage
Correct answer	20	33.33 %
Incorrect answer	40	66.66 %
Total	60	100%

Pragmatic Meaning

Response	Number	Percentage
Correct Answer	10	16.66 %
Incorrect answer	50	83.33 %
Total	60	100 %

Following the obtained findings, the students in the three situations succeeded to some extent to provide the correct answer about the semantic analysis for the three situations; that is, "It's cold in here."

The suggested semantic analyses by the 33.33% of students were as follows:

- The temperature is frigid.
- The temperature is very high.
- It is too cold.
- It is cold.

- It is cool in here.

The suggested pragmatic analyses by the 16.66% of students were as follows:

Situation 1

- We eat in the kitchen.
- We don't eat in the living-room.

Situation 2

- We switch on the heater.
- We close the door.
- We close the window

Situation 3

- There is no sun.
- A low temperature
- The temperature is not suitable.

It should be noted that not all the respondents found the semantic meaning but only about 33.33% of them, while the remaining ones (66.66%) either rewrote the same sentence 'It's cold in here' or did not provide an answer at all. Moreover, the great majority of the students failed to provide the pragmatic meaning in that, only 10 (16.66%) of the respondents managed to decipher the pragmatic meaning of the utterance: "It's cold in here.", while 50 (83.33) failed totally. 10 (16.66) of the students among 20 (33.33%) rewrote the semantic meaning instead of provide a pragmatic meaning.

The Answers suggested by Peccei (1999)

- **Situation 1: It's cold in here.**
Semantic meaning: The temperature in this place is rigid.
Pragmatic meaning: Let's eat in the kitchen.
- **Situation 2: It's cold in here.**
Semantic meaning: The temperature in this place is rigid.
Pragmatic meaning: James, shut the windo
- **Situation 3: It's cold in here.**
Semantic meaning: The temperature in this place is rigid.
Pragmatic meaning: The orchids aren't blooming because the greenhouse is too cold.

- **Discussion of the Findings**

After analysing the data, it is clear enough to state that the great majority of students failed not only to find the pragmatic meaning, but the semantic meaning as well, which reflects the non-use of the English language sufficiently; this also indicates that they did not benefit to a great extent from the sessions on Semantics. Students enrolled in second year Licence have studied a number of modules that enable them to comprehend and not only understand the English sentences. Besides English grammar, they have the Reading module that trains them to read texts critically and that assists them in comprehending the language not only at the surface level but at the deep level as well.

These results also reveal the lack of critical thinking skills on the part of the students. The sentences contain simple words that all students recognise and use in English. It should be noted that these kinds of skills among other ones are developed and then transferred from L1 to French and English, which poses many questions on the way they are reading and analysing texts in L1, Arabic, in the main.

Conclusion

Second year Licence students of English need to be involved in the practice of English language, both in speaking and writing. They should be trained in how to analyse and comprehend English sentences and pieces of writing. This can be achieved in all the modules they study mainly in Reading and Literature and, of course, in Linguistics as it includes Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis in the second semester. Teachers, on their part, are required to help these students raise their awareness towards how to comprehend both spoken and written discourse. As adult learners, they need to move onward in being able to analyse language and detect the communicated meanings.

Recommendations

- Teachers should diversify the tasks in all modules, including the Oral Expression module.
- Teachers are required to concentrate more on reading and writing skills.
- Teachers should explain the importance of context in analysing discourse.
- Teachers should train the students in the use of reading comprehension strategies.
- Teachers should impose flexibility in the teaching of Linguistics.
- Teachers should draw the students' attention towards the importance of discourse analysis, pragmatics and culture for both spoken and written discourse interpretation.
- Teachers should motivate the students through competitions and gifts.

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