

Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

3rd Year Linguistics

Textbook: Linguistics (Aichison, 2010)

Lecture Title: Using Language

- The aim of this lecture is to introduce the student the main concepts in pragmatics. It shows how the use of language (language in its communicative context) can be analyzed. The lecture outlines the 'cooperative principle' and 'speech act theory'. It also looks at ways in which sentences might be linked together, and discusses turn-taking and politeness in conversation.
- **Pragmatics** is a branch of linguistics that deals with language in use; it explores the aspects of meaning not captured by semantic theory. It deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistic knowledge alone. In a narrow sense, pragmatics deals with how listeners arrive at the intended meaning of speakers. In its broadest sense, it deals with the general principles followed by human beings when they communicate with one another.
- Pragmatics overlaps with **discourse analysis**, which deals with the various devices used by speakers and writers when they knit single sentences together into a coherent and cohesive whole.
- **The Cooperative Principle** is the principle first proposed by the American philosopher Paul Grice to explain efficient human communication. The cooperative principle involves four maxims that underpin the natural tendency of humans to help one another in communication. Grice's maxims can be collectively summarized as a general principle: 'Be cooperative'.
- **Grice's Maxims are:**
 1. Maxim of quantity: it indicates that language users should give the right amount of information and to be sufficiently informative.
 2. Maxim of quality: this maxim indicates that language users should be truthful. In other words, do not say what you lack evidence for and avoid contradiction.
 3. Maxim of relevance: this maxim emphasizes that language users should provide relevant information when engaging in communication.
 4. Maxim of manner: it means that language users should make sure that their contribution in communication is clear and orderly.
- Infringements of the cooperative principle show how strongly it works, because speakers assume that a superficially uncooperative statement is in fact handing over important information. This is because language users interpret what people say as conforming to the cooperative principle, even when this principle is overtly violated.

They draw implications about meaning that are not explicitly communicated by the sentence.

- The implications that we draw based on the assumption that the cooperative principle is always at work are called **conversational implicatures**. These implicatures fill in the gap between the explicit meaning (sentence meaning) and implicit meaning (utterance meaning), or in other words, between what the speakers say and what they actually intend.
- **Speech Act Theory** is a theory that explains language use in terms of actions. It was first proposed by the British philosopher John Austin who argued that when a speaker utters a sequence of words, s/he is often trying to achieve some effect with those words, an effect which might in some cases have been accomplished by an alternative action.
- Proponents of speech act theory try, in the first place, to list the various possible speech acts which a speaker might attempt to perform-statements, requests, queries, commands, promises, placing of bets, and so on.
- These speech acts can be direct or indirect. A direct speech act is the act expressed overtly by the most obvious linguistic means. Indirect speech act, however, is the speech act whose syntactic structure more usually associated with another act.
- But how do people know which speech act is intended, if each act can use the syntactic structure typically associated with one of the others? A possible answer is to specify **felicity conditions**- circumstances under which it would be appropriate to interpret something as a particular type of speech act. Identifying the felicity conditions of all types of speech acts can help to understand how language can actually be used.
- Human knowledge that is necessary in any communication process is stored in terms of frames. **Frames** represent data structures about stereotypical situations that can be adapted to fit in with present reality, so they are retrieved easily by language users and then adapted as required in each context if necessary.
- Any conversation involves different turns or exchanges for all the participants in that conversation. These exchanges are partially prescribed by convention and they are called **adjacency pairs**. Therefore, conversations typically follow a predictable format; exchanges are selected from a number of commonly used types. The options chosen by a particular speaker on a particular occasion depend on the social situation.
- Conversations do not necessarily run smoothly. People cannot always explain things properly, they sometimes make a mistake, or the person they are talking to makes a mistake. These minor breakdowns, if noticed, have to be 'repaired'.
- A **repair** is, then, an attempt made by one of the participants in a conversation in order to redress a communicative breakdown.
- Repairs sometimes involve **self-repair** when a speaker spontaneously notices a problem and solves it. **Other-repair**, on the other hand, takes place when someone is not quite sure about what has been said, or suspects that the other person has made a mistake. However, humans do not usually confront one another directly, so

other-initiated self-repair is very common. In such cases, a listener mildly queries the speaker, who then repairs the original utterance.

- Whenever they use language, humans tend to follow two principles to make sure that their contribution in communication is polite or socially appropriate.
- These principles are 'No criticism' and 'No imposition or interference' have an effect on language use, because any criticism or imposition can be a social risk. Therefore speakers have to balance up the advantages and disadvantages of straight talking. They have to gauge the social distance between themselves and those they are talking to, the power relationship, the cultural norms, and then make a decision.
- It is important to keep in mind that different cultures have their own communicative strategies of minimizing any offence if someone feels obliged to criticize or impose on another.