Mustansiriyah University

College of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

4th Year Linguistics

Main Textbook: The Study of Language, 6th Edition (George Yule, 2017)

Lecture Title: Pragmatics

Aim: the series of lectures aims to introduce the students to the meaning of pragmatic meaning along with the main concepts in pragmatics. It also demonstrates how the use of language (language in its communicative context) can be analyzed.

Pragmatics and pragmatic meaning

- Pragmatics can be defined as the study of "invisible meaning", or what is meant but not actually said or written. In this sense, pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that deals with language in use and explores the aspects of meaning that are not captured by semantic theory.

- In order to arrive at **pragmatic meaning**, speakers (or writers) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations when they try to communicate. The investigation of those assumptions and expectations provides us with some insights into how more is always being communicated than is said.

- **Context** is an essential concept in pragmatic analysis. It refers to the frame that surrounds the communicative event and provides resources for its appropriate interpretation. Context comprises two different types: linguistic context (also referred to as co-text) and physical context. **Co-text** refers to the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence. The surrounding co-text has a strong effect on what we think the word probably means. **Physical context**, on the other hand, refers to the users' mental representations of those aspects constituting the situation, time or place in which words are used.

Defining some pragmatic concepts:

There are certain concepts that are useful in describing and analyzing pragmatic meaning. These concepts include:

i. **Deixis**
   - **Deixis (and deictic expressions)** refers to certain words that cannot be understood without additional contextual information derived from the physical context. We use deixis to point to things (it, this, these boxes) and people (him, them, those idiots), sometimes called **person deixis**. Words and phrases used to point to a location (here, there, near that) are examples of **spatial deixis**, and those used to point to a time (now, then, last week) are examples of **temporal deixis**.

ii. **Reference**
   - **Reference** can be defined as an act by which a speaker (or writer) uses language to enable a listener (or reader) to identify something. To perform an act of reference, we can use proper nouns (Chomsky, Jennifer), other nouns in phrases (a writer, my friend, the cat) or pronouns (he, she, it). Words can be used to identify a wide range of references, but words themselves don't refer to anything; it is people who actually use them to refer.

iii. **Inference**
   - An **inference** is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant.

iv. **Anaphora**
   - When using language, usually make a distinction between introducing new referents (a puppy) and referring back to them (the puppy, it). **Anaphora** can be defined as subsequent reference to an already introduced entity in talk and text. Anaphora is often used to maintain continuity of reference and coherence. The connection between antecedents and anaphoric expressions is often based on inference.

v. **Presupposition**
   - Upon using language, we design our linguistic messages on the basis of large-scale assumptions about what our listeners (or readers) already know. **Presupposition** is what a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (or reader). In order to identify presupposition from other types of inference, we can use the **'constancy under negation' test**. It is one of the tests used to check for the presuppositions underlying sentences. It is done by negating a sentence with a particular presupposition and checking if the

presupposition remains true. For instance, whether you say *My car is a wreck* or the negative version *My car is not a wreck*, the underlying presupposition (I have a car) remains true despite the fact that the two sentences have opposite meanings.

vi. Speech Act

- Language can be used to perform actions. Upon using language, we usually interpret how the speaker (or writer) intends us to "take" (or "interpret the function of") what is said. The term "**speech act**" is used to describe the action we can perform by means of language, such as asserting, apologizing, thanking, requesting, etc.

- **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. 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. The main reason we use indirect speech acts seems to be that actions such as requests, presented in an indirect way (Could you open that door for me?), are generally considered to be more polite and readily acceptable in our society than direct speech acts (Open that door for me!).

vii. Politeness

- In the study of linguistic politeness, the most relevant concept is "face". **Face**, in pragmatics, is your public self-image. This is the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Politeness can be defined as showing awareness and consideration of another person's face.

- If you say something that represents a threat to another person's self-image, that is called a **face-threatening act**. The degree of any face-threating act is measured against diffrent factors: power, social distance, degree of imposition and cultural norms. Face-threating acts can be redressed by lessening the possible threat to another's face. Lessening the possible threat to someone's face is described as a **face-saving act**.

- Linguistic politeness is governed by the needs of our negative and positive faces. **Negative face** is the need to be independent and free from imposition. **Positive face** is the need to be connected to or be a member of the group. These two faces have an effect on language use, because any criticism or imposition can be a social risk. Therefore speakers 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.