

**Mustansiriyah University**

**College of Arts**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**3rd Year Linguistics**

**Main Textbook: The Study of Language, 8th Edition, George Yule**

**Lecture Title: Pragmatics**

### **What is Pragmatics?**

✓ Definition: Pragmatics is the study of how context influences meaning in communication.

✓ Why is it important?

1. It explains how people understand implied meanings beyond the literal words.
2. It shows how social and situational factors affect language use.

✚ Example:

- Literal meaning (Semantics): “Can you pass the salt?” → Asks about ability.
- Pragmatic meaning: It’s a request, not a question about ability.

### **Context and Its Role in Meaning**

✓ Definition: Context is the background information that helps people interpret what is said.

✚ **Types of Context:**

**1. Physical Context:** Where and when the conversation happens.

- Example: “It’s cold in here.”
- In a classroom → Might be a simple comment.

- At home with a friend → Might mean “Close the window!”

**2. Linguistic Context (Co-text):** The words surrounding an expression help determine meaning.

- Example: The word bank can mean:
- “I deposited money in the bank.” (Financial institution)
- “We sat on the bank of the river.” (Riverbank)

**3. Social Context:** The relationship between speakers affects meaning.

- Example: “Could you be quiet?”
- Said by a teacher → A strict command.
- Said by a friend → A polite request.

◆ **Key Idea:** The same sentence can have different meanings depending on the context.

## **Deixis (Pointing Through Language)**

Deictic expressions depend on context to make sense.

### ✦ **Types of Deixis:**

**1. Person Deixis:** Refers to people.

- Example: I, you, he, she, we, they

**2. Place Deixis:** Refers to locations.

- Example: here, there, this place, that place

**3. Time Deixis:** Refers to time.

- Example: now, then, today, tomorrow, last year

### ✦ **Example:**

- “I will go there tomorrow.”
- Who is “I”?
- Where is “there”?

- When is “tomorrow”?

◆ **Key Idea:** Deixis needs context to be understood.

## Reference and Inference

✓ Definition: Reference is when a speaker uses a word to point to something in the real world. The listener must use inference (logical thinking) to understand.

✚ Example:

- “Look at that guy with the mustache!” → Who is “that guy”?
- “Shakespeare is on the shelf.” → The speaker refers to Shakespeare’s books, not the person.

◆ **Key Idea:** Listeners use knowledge and context to interpret meaning.

## Presupposition (What We Assume to Be True)

✓ Definition: A presupposition is background information that is assumed to be true in a conversation.

✚ Example:

- “My sister is coming to visit.”
- Presupposition: The speaker has a sister.
- “Have you stopped smoking?”
- Presupposition: The person used to smoke.

◆ **Key Idea:** Presuppositions shape meaning without being directly stated.

## Speech Acts (Doing Things with Words)

✓ Definition: speech acts theory suggests that language is not just about stating facts, it can also perform actions.

## ✚ Types of Speech Acts:

1. **Declaratives:** Change reality (“I now pronounce you husband and wife.”)
2. **Directives:** Ask someone to do something (“Close the door.”)
3. **Commissives:** Commit the speaker to something (“I promise to help you.”)
4. **Expressives:** Show feelings (“I’m sorry.”)
5. **Representatives:** Describe reality (“It’s raining outside.”)

## ✚ Direct vs. Indirect Speech Acts:


- **Direct:** “Open the window.” (A clear command)
  - **Indirect:** “It’s really hot in here.” (A polite way to request opening the window)
- ◆ Key Idea: Speech acts depend on social context, some cultures use more indirect speech than others.

## Politeness and Face-Saving Strategies

People adjust their language to show respect, avoid conflict, and maintain relationships.

## ✚ Key Concepts:

1. **Face** – A person’s self-image in social interactions.
  2. **Face-threatening acts (FTAs)** – When speech challenges someone’s self-image.
- ### 3. Politeness Strategies:
- Positive politeness: Shows closeness (“Hey buddy, can you help me?”)
  - Negative politeness: Shows respect (“Excuse me, could you help me?”)

 Example:

- Bald command: “Give me your book.” (Rude)
- Polite request: “Would you mind lending me your book?” (Respectful)

 Key Idea: Politeness varies by culture and situation.

 Key Takeaways:

- Pragmatics is about meaning in context.
- Deixis, reference, and presuppositions shape how we understand language.
- Speech acts and politeness affect communication style.

## **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:**

#### **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-threatening act is measured against different factors: power, social distance, degree of imposition and cultural norms. Face-threatening 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.