Pragmatics: The Study Of Its Historical Overview, Meanings, Scope And The Context In Language Use

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Abstract: Speakers and writers often mean much more than they say/write and expect their hearers/listeners to understand them. They will generally assume that some aspects of meanings that are not expressed in words are deducible from the context. This assumption is based on their shared environment, values, social conventions or world view which guides them to interpret meanings beyond words or grammatical structures. Ultimately the goal is to rightly interpret the speakers intended meaning. The notion of the speakers or writer's intended meaning is a very crucial element in the study of pragmatics. As one can see in this study, traditional pragmatics is all about investigating the speaker/writer intended meaning rather than what is expressed in words. So, the aims of this study are thus: to define pragmatics in ones own words and words of other scholars of the discipline, describe the origin of pragmatics, examine the principles/goals of pragmatics, the scope of pragmatics, and the brief explanation of the context in language use.

Key words: Pragmatics, historical overview scope and context in language use.

I.   INTRODUCTION

This study will introduce one of the first significant studies that developed to what today is known as pragmatics and subsequent efforts that have popularized the discipline. One will also see how these pioneering efforts attempted to broaden the scope of pragmatics and the extent of improvement thereafter as more language scholars became interested in the field.

So, the general aim of this study is to demonstrate how language as a social phenomenon functions in practical social situations contrary to the view that it is a more cognitive skill that should be studied from a formal structuralist point of view. It therefore attempts to show how speakers and writers make language choices to achieve their intentions. And this they do effectively because the context guides them to encode and interpret meanings beyond words or grammatical structures. The overall aim of this study therefore is to expose one to the crucial notion of speaker/writer's (contextual) intended meaning – making process and not just to give one the head knowledge but also to impact practically on one's language performances at the end of this study.

The Origin of Pragmatics

The origin of modern pragmatics is attributable to Charles Morris (1938), a philosopher who was concerned with the study of the science of signs or "semiotics". According to Morris, semiotics consisted of three (3) broad branches such as (a) syntax being the formal relation of signs to one another (b) semantics being the formal relations of signs to objects to which they refer (c) pragmatics being the formal relations of signs to interpreter which is the language user.

Within each of these branches (eg syntax) Morris also distinguished between "pure studies" and "descriptive studies" pure studies concerned with the explanation or elaboration of a sign system and symbols used to describe language called metalanguage. While descriptive studies are the application of the metalanguage to a particular language, i.e. descriptions of signs (or words) and their usages.

Interestingly, Morris broad use of pragmatics has been retained in some quarters and` this explains the use of the term in disciplines such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, communication etc. Pragmatics is also used within analytical philosophy.

Another scholar in this concept is Carnap in 1938. Carnap like Morris was a philosopher and logician. His work is quite influential because of his attempt to narrow down the scope of pragmatics. He also distinguished a tracheotomy of semiotics as follows.

(i)   If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the language, then we assign it (the investigation) to the field of pragmatics.

(ii)   If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designate, (references) we are in the field of semantics.

(iii)   And finally, if we abstract from the designate also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax (quoted from Levinson, 1983:3).

Carnap retained Morris' idea of pragmatics as an investigation in which explicit reference is made to the speaker or the user of the language and equated pragmatics with descriptive semiotics (formal study of meaning). Like Morris, he made a distinction between pure and descriptive studies, equating pragmatics with the` latter. He also added a pure pragmatics to include concepts like belief, utterance and intention and how they relate to each other. This latter idea (ie pure pragmatics) has since been dropped. In the 1960's Carnap's definition of pragmatics as requiring reference to the user was adopted within linguistics, especially within a movement called " generative semantics" .

It is necessary to mention here that Carnap's definition of pragmatics as requiring reference to the user of the language is as too narrow as it is too broad. According to Levinson (1983), it is too broad because it admits such studies as " ships of the tongue" or word associations and studies in linguistics pragmatics should be restricted to investigations that have at least some linguistics implications. On the other hand, it is too narrow because if we take words like I and you for example, they identify particular participants (or users) and their role in the speech event, just as words like here and now indicate the place and time of the event (not necessarily referring to the user). Therefore it is argued that Carnap's definition might be modified to say something like " if in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the language, and those linguistic investigations that make necessary reference to aspect of the context, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics" .

Meanings of Pragmatics

Quite a number of language scholars have defined pragmatic, which are of interest to us in this study. These definitions throw some light on the nature, principles and scope of pragmatic. Let's look at a few of them.

Leech and short (1981, P. 290) maintain that pragmatics is " the investigation into that aspect of meaning which is derived not from the formal properties of words, but from the way in which utterances are used and how they relate to the context in which they are uttered. Notice the word " utterances" not necessarily sentences.

Leech (1983, P. 6) defines pragmatics as " the study of those aspects of the relationship situations" , the speech situation enables the speaker use language to achieve a particular effect on the mind of the hearer" . Thus the speech is goal-oriented (ie the meaning which the speaker or writer intends to communicate).

Levinson (1983,P.22) sees pragmatics as " the study of those aspects of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammars" . Notice in this definition that interest is mainly in the inter-relation of language and principles of language use that are context dependent.

For Yule (1996, P. 127) pragmatics is " the study of intended speaker meaning" . It is " in many ways …the study of invisible meaning or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn't actually said (or written).

Principles/goals of pragmatics

From the above definitions of pragmatics you will notice that there some common features that will help us understand better the principles and goals of pragmatics. All the definitions stress the following:

Language use i.e. language in actual speech situations (language performance rather than mere cognitive skills). In other words, what is important is how language users communicate in oral conservations or in writing not necessarily how grammatically correct the sentences are.

Discourse/utterance rather than sentence. The context of the speech – location of participants in a conversation/discourse.

-      Goal of utterance/discourse or speaker's intention.

-      Participants in a conversation/discourse situation, their roles, relationship and identities, since these have some influence on how meanings are encoded and interpreted.

Shared assumptions/knowledge, cultures, or conventions of participants in communication.

-      The fact that interaction do not rely only on their knowledge of the language system when they interpret meaning but also their knowledge of the world, cultures, conventions or world view.

In stressing utterances in communication/rather than structural sentences, a pragmatics analyst seeks to explain what communication actually " do" with language whether consciously or unconsciously. Let's look at this illustration. Jide a lights from a taxi. Luckily he sees a friend of his (Mark) standing nearly. He goes forward to talk to Mark while the taxi waits for him.

Jide: Mark, what' s up? Do you have some change on you?
Mark: What I have is not enough to pay a taxi fare " do you have some change on you?" Mark immediately understands` that Jide is not asking a yes or no question, to pay his taxi fare, so he gives an explanatory answer. Again he takes it for granted that " what' s up" is a form of greeting than a question. Now " yes" or " no" would have been the right answer to the second question if ti was asked in a different context, say a bank. Of course, you know that if they were total strangers Mark will certainly not use the same words, hence " what up" was not only a greeting but also a means on initiating a conversation/discourse. It also indicates that some psychological bond or relation exists between them. Hence Jide right assumed that Mark would interpret his " questions" correctly.

The Scope of Pragmatics
By scope, we mean the levels to which the study of pragmatics have been extended. For the purpose of our present study, we must mention that linguistic pragmatics as it is used today is a lot more restricted than when the term " pragmatics" was first used by Charles Morris (1938). Morris was interested in **semiotics** – The general study of signs and symbols pragmatics was define as the " relation of signs to the interpreters" . Morris then extended the scope of pragmatics to include psychological, biological and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs Levinson (1983). This will include what is known today as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics among others. Today, linguistics pragmatics mostly dwells on those factors of language use that govern the choices individuals make in social interaction and the effects of those choices on other (crystal, 1987).

In recent times however, extended researches in cultural studies and social discourse argue in favour of discourse pragmatics rather than the traditional linguistic pragmatics. Fairclough (1989) for instance argues that rather than see language us as an individual' s strategies of encoding meaning to achieve some particular effects on the learner or reader, we should be concerned with the fact that social conventions and ideologies, define peoples roles, identifies and language performance, people simply communicate in some particular ways as the society determines. While people can manipulate language to achieve certain purposes, they in some circumstances are actually ruled by social convention. In the same vein, pragmatic study has thrown some lights in the study of literature giving rise to literary pragmatics, while the application of pragmatics to computational linguistics has also developed into computational pragmatics, etc.

Utterance meaning and sentence meaning
This has to do with utterance meaning versus sentence meaning. In the definition of pragmatics by Leech as we have seen in this study, one will notice that one of the principles of pragmatics is the emphasis on " utterance" meaning rather than word or sentence meaning, and how such utterances relate to the context in which they are used. The difference between an utterance and a sentence is the fact that an utterance need not be syntactically perfect the same way we expect a sentence to be. A sentence must satisfy some basic grammatical rules (eg, subject/verb/complement structural pattern). An utterance on the other hand doesn' t even have to be a sentence it may be a word like " settle" , a phrase like " area boy" , a contracted form like " what' s up" or an exclamation like " **hei** or **oah!**" The " meaning" we associate` with these utterances is defined in terms of their functions or the intention of the speaker in uttering them. While sentence meaning is a function of the words in the sentence together with the overall sense of the sentence utterance meaning relies much more on the intention of the utterance in relation to the context.

The concept of the context in language use
For detail understanding of this study, the writers further examined the context in language use. In this subheading, the writers outlined and explained` the followings:
- Meaning and features of context
- Linguistics context
- Physical/environmental context
- Interpersonal context
- Situational/socio-cultural context
- Institutional context
- Components of discourse context
- Text and context

Meaning and features of context
Context refers to the situation, within which language functions. It may be physical/environmental, social context or institutional situation, including events, time, culture or social/conventions that can influence language use. The first use of the term " context of situation" is attributable to Bronislaw Malinowski, a social

anthropologist, who in his study of language behaviours among some native Indians concluded that language is a " made of action" and as social behaviour is closely tied to the relevant social situation in which it is used (Malinowski, 1935). Meaning of words was not to be restricted to sounds of utterances or their grammatical structure but must include the " pragmatics context" in which they are uttered. J. R. Firth (a linguistics) expounded this study and in his contextual theory of meaning argues that context is the bedrock of any linguistic enterprise because " normal linguistic behaviour as a whole is meaning effort, directed towards the maintenance of appropriate patterns of life" (Firth 1957:223). Since every utterance occurs within a " culturally determined context of situation" meaning si tied to that context about the speaker and the ways he perceives himself, his roles in the society and his relationship with other members of the society. As pragmatics investigates context base meaning it will be impossible to talk about pragmatics without reference to the context in which utterance are made. And as a matter of fact, linguistics codes are actually selected and used according to some social sets of standards. It is contextual considerations that make the difference between structural linguistics and socio-linguistics, pragmatics and discourse analysis. We shall also look at the features of context as we examine the various types of contexts.

Linguistics context
This refers to the set of words in the same sentence or utterance. This forms the linguistic environment that determines the sense of the words in the context. For example, if the word " shoot" appears in a linguistic context along with other words like " dribble" ' penalty" " goal" , or " over the bar" , we immediately understand the shoot that is meant. If on the other hand, the same word appears with words like " soldier" , " artillery" or " war" , the meaning is immediately known. The linguistic context (also known as co-text) of a word or words therefore has a strong effect on what we may think such words mean. Generally, words occur together and frequently used with some particular words with which they collocate.

Physical/environmental context
Again we know that words mean in the basis of the physical or environmental context. As we saw and have explained before, the meaning of the word " drink" on a library shelve is different from its meaning on the door of a canteen. The physical context definitely influenced our interpretation of the word. Our understanding of words or expressions is much more tied to the physical context particularly in terms of the time and place being referred to in the expressions. Other features of the context include:
- Participants e.g. boys, girls, men, traders.
- Ongoing activity e.g. playing, chatting, debating
- The place e.g. church, class, stadium, dining table.
- The time e.g. time of the day or season
Hymes (1964) identifies the following general contextual features:
- Participants, i.e. people involved, e.g. husband and wife, neigbhours, colleagues, teachers and students etc.
- Topic, i.e. what the discourse is about, e.g. politics, religion, race, health, etc.
- Setting, i.e. where the event takes place, e.g. home, at work, at school, etc.
- Channel, e.g. medium – speech, writing, non-verbal.
- Code (dialect/style)
- Message form (debate, chat , etc)
However, all of the above features may not rigidly be ascribed to the physical context. For example, the channel/medium or code through which the piece of discourse is carried out are determined by other variables such as education, age, status, or class which may well be described as some features of the social-cultural context.

Interpersonal context
The interpretation context focuseslgnize the influence of socio-cultural variables that affect the production of discourse, or text. But the fact remains that individual speakers or writers do make linguistic choices and decide what to say and how to say it. Therefore factors that place constraint on their ability to do this (e.g. state of the mind) is of interest of pragmatic analysts.

Situational/socio-cultural context
Unlike the other contexts discussed above, the situational context concerns mainly with socio-cultural considerations. The context of culture includes beliefs, value system, religion, conventions that control individuals' behaviour and their relationship with others. These socio cultural rules of behaviour often guide them in order to communicate effectively with one another. Some beliefs or conventions may be considered as universal, while some are culture-specific, especially those that guide utterances, non-verbal communication and other forms of social behaviour that may be interpreted meaningfully.

Knowledge of socio-cultural rules of behaviours brings up the idea of " communicative competence" which according to Dell Hymes (1972) is the ability of the speaker to know when to speaker, when not and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner. This competence is integral with attitudes, values and motivations concerning language, its features and uses in the most suitable and appropriate contexts. Take a newspaper headline like " The butcher of Zamfara" for an example how would a non-Nigerian interpret it considering the general meaning of " butcher" ? How would you interpret it – as a Nigerian who is familiar with the controversy surrounding the implementation of the Sharia in the Northern states? Take

A little child: (Scribbles unintelligibly on the surface of a white paper and presents it to his father, smiling) Daddy see…!

Father: *hugs the child) ah…beautiful, this is the most brilliant writing I ' ve ever seen

You will agree with me that the father has applied the best communicative etiquette in his response to his child' s writing, considering the context and the participant in the communication event.

Institutional context

Much of what we refer to here as " institutional context" may have actually been covered as part of the social/cultural context, but it is necessary to identify certain elements of the context in some specialized kind of settings like educational institutions, which impose some constraints in language use. Take a convent or a purely Islamic institutions for example: There are certain convention there that govern people' s mode of communicate and behaviour which is not justice " social" or " cultural" we consider this as institutional and much of this institutional standards or " common sense assumptions" (Faire Cough, 1989), determine social behaviour and individuals simply imbibe them as natural and unchanging. For example, there are certain ways people must greet one another in some of these places. Expressions such as " bless you' or " it is well" in some Christian mission universities have become almost institutionalized that people are made to believe that unless they greet each other that way they may never be enjoy certain privileges. In some cases these rather peculiar manner of expression help to identify the individuals and the institutions they are associated with.

Components of discourse context

M.A.K Halliday (1976) identifies three components of the context which we shall discuss in this sub-section. According to Halliday, situation types can be represented as a complex of three dimensions, namely:
(i)   The ongoing activity
(ii)   The role relationships
(iii)   The symbolic channel (i.e. the medium, either written or spoken).
          The ongoing activity is referred to as the field which is the total event in which the text (or utterance is functioning). It is the primary aim of the discourse and what subject matter the interactant must explore.
          According to Hudson (1980), the field of discourse is the " what about the shy" of discourse. It may be political, religious, academic, health, manage etc. very often an individuals cholce of words in a conversation is governed by the field of discourse.
The role relationship are referred to as the tenor. It is the " with whom" of discourse. The tenor shows the kinds of social relationships that exists among interactants types of role interaction (how they take turns and what influences it) and how temporal or permanent such relationships are. It also mirrors the identities of the people involved. Some social variables such as age, status, education etc influence how individuals assign roles to one another in conversations.
The mode of discourse is the function of the text in the event, including the medium of expression. This is the third component of the dimensions of the context. Hudson calls it " the how" of discourse. Again the subject matter of a discourse and the relationship between the interactants often determine the best mode of expressing the text, either in writing or verbally. Legal documents for example demand writing while interpersonal communication is usually done orally. The choice of words is also influenced by the formality or informality of the relationship that exists among speakers or writers. Look at this example: two people address the same person (Oluwatosin Adeyemi) in the following terms.
A: You' re welcome Miss Adeyemi (formal)
B: Hi Tosin! (informal)

Text and context

Igiri T. O. et al (2018:46-47) a text can simply be described as a type of written or spoken discourse or a sequence of paragraphs that represent an extended unit of speech. A text is not just a random collection of sentences. A text must be meaningful, in the sense that the`lliday and Hasan (1976) as quoted by the same Igiri T. O. et al (2018) described a text as " a semantic unit" typically in any text, every sentence except the first exhibits some form of cohesion with the preceding (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:292) in Igiri T. O. et al (2018).

They maintain that texts are classified into gaurs on the communicator. Although there are different ways of classifying texts, sox text types are generally recognized, and they are: recount report, procedure, explanation, exposition, and experimental report. Each of these text types has different linguistic structures and features. For instance, a report is written in the past tense since it is an account of something the communicator had experienced some time ago.

In the same Igiri T. O. et al (2018:6-7) the word " context" is a commonly used expression, which may mean different things to different people. Its general meaning is the set of facts that surrounds particular events of view. Context is everything that surrounds the production of a piece of communication. These include the physical situation, the communicators, their cultural norms and expected behaviour, and the expressions that precede and follow a particular expression. All these features of context help language speakers to interpret meaning appropriately. Linguistics is particularly interested in the linguistic use.

II. DISCUSSION

We can see that interest in the study of the nature of meaning is not just a linguistic affair, but a concern that cuts across discipline. This explains why earlier studies of meaning began with philosophers (e.g. Charles Morris and Carnap). It is interesting to note that the search, for both linguistic and social meanings is an ongoing activity and the results of these studies have further thrown significant lights on the true nature of meaning.

So, we can therefore maintain that pragmatics as a linguistic discipline is a worthwhile academic endeavour as it exposes us to interesting insights to the actual functions of language in social interactions. Thus, the study of language has been extended significantly beyond mere description of linguistic properties to the various creative ways individual communicators construct meaning in different socio-cultural contexts. Pragmatics has also been above to account for social meanings which formal semantics has tended to overlook, giving new insights to the understanding of literary texts and in fact helping to formulate strategies for the teaching and learning of language.

We have been able to look at the` features and types of contexts namely: linguistic context, physical environmental context, interpersonal context, situational/socio-cultural context and institutional context. All these context types dictate meaning and effective communicators are able to combine the features of each in their communication. It is important to note here that virtually all of these contexts have a part to play in any particular piece of discourse or conversation. For example two people in a discussion will generally choose words that belong to the same linguistic context and possibly apply analogies that are relevant to both their environmental and cultural contexts. They may even go ahead to speak certain slang that belong to their` professional or institutional context which non-member may not readily understand. Effective communication always do this. We have also looked at the components fo discourse context as field, tenor and mode, where field stands for the topic/theme of the communicative event, tenor as the role relationships between interactants and mode as the choice of the medium of expression, either written or spoken. A written piece of discourse or an utterance is referred to as text which depends on the context for its meaning.

III. CONCLUSION

The first use of the term " pragmatics" is associated with Charles Morris and Carnap in the 1930' s. These were philosophers who were interested in the study of semiotics (the science of signs) and how the meaning associated with signs may be described in linguistics terms. Hence, they distinguished three (3) branches of semiotics as syntax, semantics and pragmatics. While Morris used the term " interpreter" to explain the focus of pragmatic study, Carnap used the expression " the user of the language" . Carnap identified the fact that since the investigation of meaning is user based, it must therefore seek to find what intention the user has for using some particular words or sentences. It is the intention of the speaker that indicates the functions of the utterance and what results that are anticipated. This view of linguistic pragmatics was eventually adopted generally, dropping other broader psychological and sociological aspects of signs proposed by Charles Morris.

The study also examined the various definitions of pragmatics which enable us see the actual concerns and goals of linguistic pragmatics. All the definitions agree that pragmatics is a study of meaning from the point of view of the language user, showing what chooses he/she makes and how these capture his/her intentions in some particular contexts. Hence, pragmatics stresses utterances rather than sentences, utterance functions/goals rather than grammaticalness and the kinds of cultures/conventions which influence how speakers/writers encode and interpret meaning. We have also examined some areas of study where pragmatic principles have been quite useful in the interpretation of meaning giving rise to discourse pragmatics, literacy pragmatics, computational pragmatics among others.

As a matter of fact, pragmatics has been defined by many scholars as the study of context – based meaning. In other words, the study of pragmatics is the study of how language use is influenced by the context.

Context is the central " influencer" of meaning especially considering how people interact with one another in different situations.

In your own personal interactions and relationships, you will agree that all the time you were able to communicate effectively with people because you recognize the kind of social attitudes and convention that guided four interactions and you responded exactly the way you were expected to respond. You were able to apply your knowledge of the society and its cultures in your interactions and you talked when you should and kept silent at other times. All these are factors of the context which determined the way you related with others as a member of the same society.

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