

Appreciating Linguistics: A typological approach
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Lecture - 51
Pragmatics: An introduction – Part 2

Hello everyone, welcome to this session of the NPTEL course Appreciating Linguistic: A typological approach.



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Defining Pragmatics

- Study of the relations of signs to interpreters
- Study of language usage
- Study of those principles that will account for why a certain set of sentences are anomalous, or not possible utterances
- Study of language from a functional perspective
- Study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language

*Pragmatics
→ Context-dependent
aspect of language
↳ structure
→ Principles of language
usage*

*eg: Come here, here!
eg: I order you not to
play this order.*



The third definition on the slide was about anomaly of sentences. Acceptability versus unacceptability of sentences, why in a particular language certain constructions are anomalous, certain or not; why a few constructions are possible to be a process in the discourse, but a few others are not. Somebody who studies that, is going to be considered as a pragmaticist or this is what the definition of pragmatics should be if you approach it from a linguistics perspective.

But besides that, we can also have a domain relative definition for pragmatics. Considering it focuses on the usage of language more than the structure or beyond the structure, besides the structure of natural language, it focuses or it is concerned with the usage or the descriptive study of the language. That is the reason why another side of the definition story is and what

definition story? The pragmatic definition story is, pragmatics is the study of language from a functional perspective, but that is also very vague, superfluous kind of a sentence or statement, it does not really give you much information.

It could be anything. When you say pragmatics is the study of language from a functional perspective, it could be functional let us say morphology could be functional, phonology could be functional. What is so special about pragmatics? Why pragmatics should be treated as a separate discipline? Considering I just mentioned it is related to the meaning. I showed you the two pictures. I showed that how in the picture of a sign board though there is a shortage of enough linguistic input yet you got the full meaning.

Pragmatics would then be considered as just a part of semantics, but that is not true, pragmatics has its own identity, it is considered to be an independent discipline. So, if you look at that, then you can say it is too blunt or you can say it is too vague to define this as a study of language from a functional perspective.

Of course, we agree it is going to be on the study from a functional perspective, but what exactly do you want to study? Even within the functional perspective, within the descriptive perspective or within the descriptive framework rather or descriptive domain, what exactly do you want to study as far as pragmatics is concerned?

So, the fifth definition that we see on the slide is the best definition I would say or the most comprehensive definition. And what is that comprehensive definition? Let us read it out. Pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized or encoded in the structure of a language. It sounds a little longish, but do not worry, let us break it part by part and then you can easily understand that.

So, what is this saying? Pragmatics is the study of those relations, so the first thing the first word that should catch your attention is relation. You must find out the relation between x and y, what is x and what is y, we will check it now. Relation between language and context that a grammaticalized means it has changed, some things have been eroded, some things have been added, or something as like to to put it in the more broad way I would say

grammaticalized means a lot of things have changed; there has been a metamorphosis of a particular linguistic phrase.

So, the changed language and context which are encoded in the structure of a language, grammaticalization is one of the most important things to understand pragmatics, and because of this grammaticalization we do see a lot of pragmatic changes, semantic changes. These changes would eventually lead to the discussion on pragmatic typology which is a baby discipline, if you check the internet or if you try to find out the reading material, not many things have been discussed, that does not mean that nothing has been discussed, not really, a lot of researchers are working on that. But as far as pragmatic typology is concerned, very few crosslinguistic generalizations have been drawn because of the abstract nature of semantics and pragmatics together. Now let us focus on the finest or the most conceptual definition of pragmatics.

So, what is important? Which term do you think is important in this definition? The term grammaticalized or grammaticalization. What is been grammaticalized here? The language and then context, both have been taken into account and the context has been grammaticalized.

You are trying to see this grammaticalization how it is encoded in the structure of a language. So, keeping grammaticalization in the focus pragmatics tries to understand how it has been encoded, how it has been a part of the structure of language and how to account for it. This encoding of the structure of language as far as grammaticalization is concerned, we have to understand that when we study pragmatics.

That is the finest and the most conceptual definition that I could give for the moment. All of this information I have got from Levinson's book, Levinson has done a seminal work on pragmatics, please refer to it. I think it is again a Cambridge university press book. The title of the book is Pragmatics and the author is Stephen C Levinson.

So, these anomalous and possible utterances I would go back to it, but just remember these are some standard definitions that we may consider as far as pragmatics is concerned. May I ask you to focus on this just to show that how this definition can be a faulty one. Can you let us say an example here, come there please, this is a weird construction as far as the anomaly

of a particular sentence is concerned. Come here please, is fine, but then you cannot say come there please, to put there you have to say go, go there please is ok, but you cannot say go here please. So, these are the anomalies or these are the impossible utterances.

These impossible utterances why they are impossible, what is so wrong about it? It can be decided or can be identified if you understand pragmatics well. The other example let us say if I say I hereby sing, sing what? Sing a song or something. So, grammatically also it is unacceptable, pragmatically also it is unacceptable. The other sentence that Levinson would talk about, I order you not to obey this order.

That is a very interesting example actually, look at this, example 2, I order you not to obey this order. What do you mean by this? Do you see any connection? Do you think it does have any interpretation? First you are ordering and you are ordering that your order should not be obeyed.

So, there is a conflict, grammatically it sounds correct, absolutely fine. There is no subject-verb agreement mismatch nothing, but when you try to interpret, so the interpretation, one is sign and other one is interpretation. The interpretation is clumsy, confusing, you are not able to conceptualize or you are not able to understand anything.

You are not going to or you are not able to find out any meaning of this sentence. How would it be possible, you are ordering something and you are saying not to obey your order. Then why you are ordering? So these are a couple of examples that I could bring as far as pragmatics or anomaly of a sentence is concerned in the domain of pragmatics.

When I say the sentences are anomalous; that means, these utterances are not possible in this kind of a linguistic discourse. That is about the basic definition or the basic definitions that we might have or we should consider as far as pragmatics is concerned.

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Scope of Pragmatics

- Context
 - Linguistic vs. Physical
- Details
 - Personal
 - Spatial
 - Temporal
- Presupposition
 - What a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (or reader)
- Speech acts
 - Requesting
 - Commanding
 - Questioning
 - Informing
 - Promising
- Conversational implicatures
 - Inferences that arise on the basis of some general rules or maxims of conversational behavior

Context → to withdraw cash
Bank → to take or walk by the river side

Details → Personal (like who is)
Temporal (like time, place)



With this information, we will move to the scope of pragmatics. Now since we understood pragmatics at least partly, if not entirely, it is surely the study of language use; it is also the study of language from a functional perspective. But, at the same time two most important things to remember is that it does help us to identify or to understand the anomaly of constructions, or the anomaly of sentences.

So, the pragmatic features, or the pragmatic information associated with the sentence should give us a clue why a particular construction is going to be anomalous or is going to be impossible. But above everything or keeping everything aside, the most important thing or the most crucial definition of pragmatics would be to study the relation between language and context that are grammaticalized.

When I say grammaticalized, here grammaticalized or grammaticalized means in a broader sense that covers the encoding of meaning distinctions. When the meaning changed over the period of time, that entire process or that phenomenon is known as grammaticalization. You may see that in lexicon, morphological section, syntax, and phonology of languages.

So, to put it in a broader sense, it is going to be meaning change. This grammaticalization would help us to understand pragmatic typology later. Whether it is possible for us to draw any crosslinguistic generalization I have like we will discuss it later, we are not very sure,

but, at least the whole story of pragmatic typology revolves around grammaticalization and that leads to the semantic change as well as the pragmatic change.

The most conceptual or the sharpest definition of pragmatics would be to study the relation between language and context that are grammaticalized or how it has been encoded in the structure of language. That takes care of both the structural aspect as well as the functional aspect. Just by limiting it to the language use, or language description, or functional perspective would not do enough justice to pragmatics.

So, we have to put it or you have to use it or you have to understand it both or by an inclusive approach of formal and functional linguistics as a discipline right ok. So, how it is encoded in the that grammaticalized, how it is encoded in the structure is the definition of the definition of pragmatics right.

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Types of Pragmatics

- Universal pragmatics: The general theory of what aspects of context get encoded and how,
- Language-specific pragmatics: Individual Language specific discussion



Now, let us take this discussion forward, what is the major scope of pragmatics we need to study? The first thing is that pragmatics would have some five major scopes. When I say five major scopes, I have already discussed one of them in the beginning of my discussion which is context, where the context includes both the linguistic context and then the co-text.

We will talk about it in more detail, but before that let us first list what are the contexts which are involved in the study of pragmatics. One would be the physical context, the other one would be the linguistic context and the linguistic context includes the context.

Let us take the discussion forward, let us say we know how to interpret the words on the basis of the physical context. And what is physical context? I have written here, to either linguistic or physical, linguistic context you know is about the use of phrases, words, and sentences. And what is the physical context? Physical context would be in what situation this particular word has been used.

Let me give you an example. Let us say bank, I am talking about the context in pragmatics, what is it? Bank could be a what? Homonym right. And why bank would be considered as a homonym? Because the spelling is same, the pronunciation is same, but it has different meanings. It depends on the context. If you are using it in the context of money or to withdraw some cash, bank would mean something else.

But if you want to take a walk in the evening by the riverside, bank will have a different meaning altogether. So, depending on the context or depending on the situation, the meaning of the words change and that is one of the most important scope of pragmatics. When you are trying to understand the meaning of a particular term, you have to find out which context has it been used.

So, this is the example to withdraw cash, that is one domain; the other domain is to take a walk, take a walk by the riverside. Here, the scope of pragmatics is the context, one is the physical context the other one is the linguistic context. Linguistic context is the homonym here. It could mean either this or that. Then what decides the meaning? Does linguistic context alone decide the meaning? No, it will create confusion. If you just say she is at the bank, what does it mean? Which bank are you talking about?

The linguistic context is not sufficient here, you must identify what is the physical context, if she is at the bank for withdrawing cash, then it is money bank, and if she is there by the riverside just to take a walk, then it is the riverbank. So, the physical context, and linguistic

context both are equally important when you are talking about scope of pragmatic, is it clear? I hope it is.

You need to find out what is the relevant context here, and which one would help you to interpret things in a more holistic way, whether the linguistic expression or the physical context. If you are talking about time and place and stuff like that, spatial and temporal information, that will be a physical context and if you are talking about the phrases and words then it is going to be linguistic context. I hope it is clear now.

Now, let us move on to the next scope of pragmatics. The second thing in the domain of pragmatics or scope of pragmatics would be deixis. If this is a very new word for you, these are the informations related to space, time, and person.

Let me give a very common or very simple example. There are some very common words in our language that cannot be interpreted at all if we do not know the context. I think that holds true for all the languages in the world. If you do not know the context, you cannot understand the meaning of it or may be you can understand the meaning, but you cannot interpret the exact information, it cannot be interpreted.

So, why it cannot be interpreted? Because the meaning changes when the rest of the words in the sentence change. For example, here and there. What do you mean by here? It would be dependent on a particular person where she or he is standing, sitting, or working or whatever. Just by simply saying here, you do not get any interpretation, what could it mean if I am standing at the back of the classroom that is here, if I am standing in the front that is here.

Standing in the front, if I talk about the back of the classroom that will be there. Similarly the interpretation of this, that is going to change if I move to the classroom, if I move to the back of the classroom, back would be here, front would be there; if I move to the front of the classroom front would be here, and back would be there.

So, what does it mean? That means, just these linguistic informations or linguistic context is not enough, we have to find out some other deictic information, some other pragmatic markers or some other pragmatic information. Words like this here, there, this, that, now, then, yesterday, today, tomorrow, so these are the words, also the pronouns me, she, him, it.

So, the interpretation changes depending on the situation or depending on the context that they are in, these are the deictic markers or these are deictic phrases. These deictic phrases could be either personal, or spatial, or temporal. So this is about context, then the next box I would draw this is deixis; deixis will have personal, then you have spatial, and then you have temporal. This temporal information or personal information would include he, she, etcetera; spatial would include here, there, etcetera, and temporal would include now, then. These are the deictic phrases; and why we would call them as deictic phrases? Primarily because they are context sensitive. Just as linguistic inputs or linguistic phrases are not enough, so the linguistic context is not enough to understand these deictic markers or the deictic phrases.

We need to find out what are the other expressions associated with it, and what kind of expression whether related to person, related to space, related to time. When the information is related to person, we have the personal pronouns as the deictic phrases, when the information is related to space here, there we have the spatial deictic phrases.

And when we have the information related to time: now, then, last week, that would be temporal deixis. I hope it is clear. These are all conceptual questions or conceptual things that you might encounter as questions in the domain of pragmatics, so that is the deixis.

Keywords: anomaly, grammaticalization, linguistic context, physical context, deixis