

Original Paper

Pragmatics as Pragma-sociolinguistics of Discourse

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Abstract

In construing pragmatics as pragma-sociolinguistics of discourse, a tripartite perspective of pragmatics is brought to the fore: it is a contextual perception of language use; it is a socially underpinned use and interpretation of human communication; and it concerns discourse (language in use). In discourse, language is functional because of the discrete pragma-sociolinguistic elements of communication deployed by language users/participants. Since discourse is indeed, language in use or language in action, a pragmatic study of discourse explains how social context, physical context and linguistic context impinge on “what is said” within and beyond the sentence. Hinging on Adebija’s (1982) Pragmasociolinguistic Approach, this study concludes that pragmatics is essentially the pragma-sociolinguistics of discourse because: it is a social idea of discourse; it is linguistic action; it is situated/contextualized discourse; it is reference-making; and it is organized discourse.

Keywords

pragmatics, discourse, sociolinguistics, linguistics, Pragmasociolinguistic Approach

1. Introduction

Like pragmatics, discourse is cross-disciplinary. It covers diverse disciplines and facets of life. Thus, in the analysis of texts through a pragmatic-analyst approach or a discourse-analyst approach, “context of speech” invokes “context of situation”. Brown and Yule (1983) note that “the term, ‘discourse analysis’, has come to be used with a wide range of meanings, which cover a wide range of activities. It is used to describe activities at the intersection of disciplines as diverse as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, philosophical linguistics and computational linguistics. Scholars working centrally in these different disciplines tend to concentrate on different aspects of discourse. Sociolinguists are particularly concerned with the structure of social interaction manifested in conversation and their descriptions emphasize features of social context which are particularly amenable to socio-logical classification. They are concerned with generalizing across ‘real’ instances of language in use, and typically work with transcribed spoken data. Psycholinguists are particularly concerned with issues related to language

comprehension. They typically employ a tight methodology derived from experimental psychology, which investigates problems of comprehension in short constructed texts or sequences of written sentences. Philosophical linguists, and formal linguists, are particularly concerned with semantic relations between constructed pairs of sentences and with their syntactic realizations. They are concerned, too, with relationships between sentences and the world in terms of whether or not sentences are used to make statements which can be assigned truth-values.” Human beings do not live in society without communicating or talking to one another (discourse). In this sense, discourse, which is essentially human interaction, is as old as human existence. Pragmatics analyzes discourse or texts using linguistic and extralinguistic elements of communication, with emphasis on context-informed language use. The analysis of discourse through a pragmatic-analyst or discourse-analyst approach, points to the fact that language use is neither arbitrary nor incidental when focus is on processing sender-meaning. This study examines pragmatics as pragma-sociolinguistics of discourse by elucidating the functions of social variables, linguistic inputs and discourse features of texts in the encoding and decoding of utterances.

2. Literature Review

This section of the paper examines pragmatics, discourse, discourse analysis and sociolinguistics.

2.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a field of language study. Its thrust is context-based analysis of language use. Its emergence shifted emphasis in language use, from linguistic conventions to contextual underpinnings. The term “pragmatics” is from the Greek word *pragma* which means “deed” or “action”. According to the *Encyclopedia Americana* (1994), pragmatics is “the subfield of the study of language that investigates the techniques by which language is processed for communication purposes.” In addition, Crystal and Varley (1993) define pragmatics as “the study of the factors that govern our choice of language (sounds, construction, words) in social interaction, and the effects of our choice upon others. The subject includes the cooperation in our speaking behavior and it thus involves using language to convey politeness, intimacy, playfulness, rudeness, awkwardness and a range of other social attributes. Kasia M. Jaszczolt (2012, p. 103) submits that “pragmatics has very respectable roots in philosophical writings of ordinary language philosophers of the Anglo-American tradition, and even further into the past, in the phenomenological writings in continental Europe.” Adebija (1999) gives insights on pragmatics from the perspective of the scope of the term. According to Adebija (1999), the scope of pragmatics include:

- (i.) The message being communicated;
- (ii.) The participants involved in the message;
- (iii.) The knowledge of the world which they share;
- (iv.) The deductions to be made from the text on the basis of the context; and
- (v.) The impact of the non-verbal aspect of interaction on meaning.

Austin (1962) lists crucial concepts in the pragmatics which are as follows:

- participants (users of language in context);

- speech acts (locutionary act which is an utterance with determinate sense and reference; illocutionary act which is the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence by virtue of the conventional force associated with it; and perlocutionary act which is the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence);
- context (the relevant aspects of the physical or social setting of an utterance or discourse);
- non-verbal communication (extra-linguistic communication);
- inference (the process of making logical conclusions from all that a particular context provides to arrive at what a speaker means);
- presupposition (facts that the participants of discourse take for granted in a particular context of communication); and
- shared knowledge (common background information shared by the participants of discourse).

Classical pragmatic theorists are language philosophers who view meaning beyond the sentence and in terms of action-potential of language.

2.2 Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Brown and Yule (1983, p. 1), define discourse as “language in use.” Discourse operates as a message-laden linguistic structure. Olugbenga Ibileye (2018, p. 1) opines that “the theoretical basis of the emergence of the field of discourse analysis is a pervading phenomenon, which governs human lives and daily activities sometimes in an unconscious way. Discourse has been variously conceived by scholars as the authentic product of human interaction as well as being the concrete aspect of the abstractness of communication ... discourse defines the human essence as it reflects what a speaker wants, who the speaker is and what the speaker does ...” According to Stubbs (1983, p. 1), discourse is: “(1) concerned with language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence/utterance, (2) concerned with the interrelationships between language and society and (3) as concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication.” Discourse subjects vary according to textual categories: doctor-patient interactions, military coup speeches, election campaign speeches, religious sermons, etc. According to Brown and Yule (ibid p. x), “... a wide array of linguistic ‘texts’ are explored in the study of discourse. These might consist of a conversation or a letter; a speech, a memo or a report; a broadcast, a newspaper article or an interview; a lesson, a consultation or a confrontation encounter; an advertisement of flier or a piece of gossip. Discourse analysts are as concerned (if not more so) to examine the way in which meaning is constructed throughout the text, as with the way this is achieved at any one point in the text.” Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (2001, p. 1) submit that “discourse analysis is a rapidly growing and evolving field. Current research in this field now flows from numerous academic disciplines that are very different from one another. Included, of course, are the disciplines in which models for understanding and methods for analyzing discourse first developed, such

as linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. But also included are disciplines that have applied – and thus often extended – such models and methods to problems within their own academic domains, such as communication, cognitive psychology, social psychology, and artificial intelligence”

2.3 Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is concerned with language and society. A society accommodates socio-cultural values and speech behaviour. A basic instrument of human communication, language establishes the link between man (generic) and society. According to Crystal (1971), language is “the systematic conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self-expression.” Bosede Sotiloye (1992) defines sociolinguistics as “a field of study which relates societal problems to linguistic/language problems. It answers the question: how do our social and cultural backgrounds affect our use of language? It is a branch of linguistics which tries to answer questions like who says what to whom, when, where, how and why? One of the major aims of sociolinguistics is the study of the use of language in its social and cultural contexts. It studies the norms of the society at large and examines how the individual exploits his awareness of the society’s norms in order to achieve particular effects.” According to Abiodun Sofunke (1992), sociolinguistics is “... another major area of applied linguistics. The sociolinguistic aspect of applied linguistics is concerned with issues which indicate the interaction between language and society. Society is in general divided along class and occupational lines, these divisions being in most cases reflected in language. The elucidation of the nature and use of these socially stratified speech forms is the business of sociolinguistics.”

3. Theoretical Framework

Adegbija’s Pragmasociolinguistic Approach (cf. Adegbija 1982) to the analysis of discourse or text captures the pragmatic, social and linguistic variables that facilitate the use and interpretation of language. Therefore, it is a suitable framework for explaining pragmatics as the sociolinguistics of discourse. According to Adegbija (1982), the concept encapsulates the historical, personal, environmental, sociocultural and linguistic contexts. The pragmatic context concerns pragmatic variables such as presupposition and shared knowledge that utterances invoke in contexts. The social context involves the relationship between participants of discourse. The linguistic aspect of context has to do with choice of words and how words are patterned in sentences. For example, the words before or after a particular word in a sentence determines meaning. See Adegbija (1982) for more insights on the theory.

4. Pragmatics as Sociolinguistics of Discourse

The different perspectives, from which pragmatics can be arguably viewed as sociolinguistics of discourse, are not only presented in this section, but they are also explained.

4.1 Pragmatics as Socially Underpinned Discourse

Labove (1977) contends that “no use of language can be divorced from its social context since special meaning is parasitic upon language.” As textual communication, pragmatics shows the socio-cultural

nuances that discourse participants bring to the fore in actual instances of language use. Thus, every discourse or text has “topic relevance” which involves message, sender and audience. Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, cited in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (2001, p. 385) contend that “we obviously need to think about what our ‘text’ is about, since clearly what a person is talking about has a bearing on what is said and how it is said. We also need to think about who said it, or who wrote it or signed it, who is thought, in its particular socio-cultural context, to be responsible for what it says, who the intended audience was and who the actual hearers or readers were, because who the participants in a situation are and how their roles are defined clearly influence what gets said and how. We need to think about what motivated the text, about how it fits into the set of things people in its context conventionally do with discourse ... According to these general aims one can distinguish between constructive, perpetuating, transformational, and destructive social macro-functions of discourse.” Fairclough (1992, p. 8) provides insights on the social perspective of discourse, as evident in his submission that “discourse constitutes the social. Three dimensions of the social are distinguished: knowledge, social relations, and social identity and these correspond respectively to three major functions of language. Discourse is shaped by relations of power, and invested ideologies.” The different “contexts of speech” and “contexts of situation” that explain texts, accentuate the claim that pragmatics and discourse analysis are indeed, concerned with the social perspective of language. As fields of language study, they are about human beings in society. Human society is anchored by value-systems, socio-cultural practices and standards of behaviour. All these social elements do not only constitute shared knowledge of discourse participants, but also count as the referents of language use. Through linguistic inputs of the participants of discourse, a wide range of propositions can be conveyed within and beyond the sentence, and the participants, being part of the universe of discourse, rely on speaker-hearer shared knowledge to deduce discourse subjects. Shared knowledge and presuppositions are whatever discourse participants expect their interlocutors to know (cognitive pragmatics) as the background knowledge from the universe of discourse. Chilton (2005a, p. 23) rightly notes that “cognitive pragmatics is defined as a study of mental states of the interlocutors, their beliefs, desires, goals, and intentions (cf. Bara 2010, p. 1) produced and interpreted by human individuals interacting with one another ... If language use (discourse) is, as the tenets of CDA assert, connected to the construction of knowledge about social objects, identities, processes, etc., then that construction can only be taking place in the minds of (interacting) individuals.” Bach and Harnish (1979) is quite illuminating not only in terms of social perspective of language use, but also in the elucidation of shared knowledge, speakers’ intention (sender-meaning), inference-making, literal and non-literal illocutionary strategies in discourse. The theory contends that Mutual Contextual Beliefs (MCBs) facilitates the inferential process. To infer what S is saying, the hearer (H) relies also on “Presumption of Literalness” (PL); that is, the hearer should know when the linguistic communication of the speaker (S) is within or outside the bounds of literalness, and if S is speaking in a non-literal dimension, H should not only acknowledge it, but should also be able to

understand what such speech by S means. These theorists recognize other types of beliefs shared by an entire linguistic community, which the hearer relies on for inference-making:

- 1). Linguistic Presumption (LP); and
- 2). Communicative Presumption (CP).

Linguistic Presumption (LP) refers to the moral belief that members of a Linguistic Community (LC) share on the particular language (L). Therefore, any expression (e) uttered by a member to any member of the community, is taken by the speaker for granted; the speaker presupposes that the hearer understands the expression or utterance. The recognition of a speaker's communicative intention implies that an utterance is successfully conveyed. Bach and Harnish (ibid) recognize two broad categories of illocutionary acts: communicative and non-communicative. While the former requires the recognition of S's R-intention, the latter does not. Within the scope of this paper, the theory will not be elaborately presented. See Bach and Harnish (ibid) for more tips on speech acts, intention, shared knowledge, literal and non-literal utterances and inference-making strategies.

When linguistic elements are deployed in context, social variables determine felicity conditions. Bosco et al. (2006) note that "conversation is a two-fold activity in which the participants form utterances that are products of shared meaning, and such utterances produce felicitous results to the communicative event." Speech acts operate acceptably in context when social variables (as in felicity conditions) are part of their performance. Austin (ibid) explains that speech acts can be felicitous when the required conditions (appropriate participants, the right words at the right place) for their performance are fulfilled. Thus, this study situates language within social phenomena in discourse, as a means of capturing the basic concerns of pragmatics in language study (Note 1). The literature is replete with the relevance of socio-cultural nuances in the performance of speech acts. For example, Sapir (1956) opines that "every cultural pattern and every single act of social behavior involves communication in either one explicit or implicit sense."

4.2 Pragmatics as Language in Action

Like in pragmatics, discourse analysis is concerned with the functions of the linguistic elements in a text. From the perspective of functionality, discrete speech acts (actions) are performed in using utterances in discourse: informing, persuading, advising, asserting, ascribing, acknowledging, etc. In this sense, language users, as Austin (ibid) notes, "do things with words". For more tips on the literature of speech acts, see Austin (ibid), Searle (1969) as well as Bach and Harnish (1979). Brown and Yule (ibid: p. 25) report that "the discourse analyst ... is interested in the function or purpose of a piece of linguistic data and also in how that data is processed, both by the producer and by the receiver. It is natural consequence that the discourse analyst will be interested in the results processing experiments in a way which is not typical of the sentence-grammarian. It also follows that the work of those sociolinguists and ethnographers who attempt to discuss language in terms of user's purposes will also be of interest." The propositions of utterances are intentional actions towards social institutions. John T. Kearns cited in Savas L. T. (1994) notes that "a linguistic act, or speech act, is an intentional, meaningful act performed with

an expression or expressions. Even though the word ‘speech’ suggests saying something out loud, I use the two expressions ‘speech act’ and ‘linguistic act’ interchangeably for acts performed with expressions, whether they are out loud, in writing, or ‘in one’s head’. Both speakers/writers and their audiences (when they understand the speakers/writers) perform linguistic acts.” In using language to perform actions, and interpreting illocutionary acts as either literal, non-literal, direct or indirect, language users (speakers) demonstrate linguistic and communicative competence. In terms of linguistic competence, scholars hold the view that speakers of a given language have appreciable repertoire of knowledge concerning the language. In this regard, consider Kreidler’s (1998, pp. 11-12) submission:

Speakers of a language generally agree as to when two sentences have essentially the same meaning and when they do not ...

3). Speakers generally agree when two words have essentially the same meaning – in a given context ...

4). Speakers recognize when the meaning of one sentence contradicts another sentence ...

5). Speakers generally agree when two words have opposite meanings in a given context ...

6). Synonyms and antonyms have to have some common elements of meaning in order to be, respectively, the same or different. Words can have some element of meaning without being synonymous or antonymous ...

7). Some sentences have double meanings; they can be interpreted in two ways. Speakers are aware of this fact because they appreciate jokes which depend on two-way interpretation ...

8). Speakers know how knowledge is used when people interact. If one person asks a question or makes a remark, there are various possible answers to the question or replies one might make to the remarks ...

9). Speakers are aware that two statements may be related in such a way that if one is true, the other must also be true.

10). Speakers know that the message conveyed in one sentence may presuppose other pieces of knowledge ...

4.3 Pragmatics as Situated Discourse

In pragmatics and discourse analysis, it is widely acknowledged that language users communicate in specific settings/physical contexts. Commenting on features of physical context of communication, Butari Nahum Upah (2018: 19) cites NOUN (2010):

- (i) Participants, e.g. boys, girls, men, traders
- (ii) Ongoing activity, e.g. playing, chatting, debating
- (iii) The place, e.g. church, class, stadium, dining table
- (iv) The time, e.g. time of the day or season.

Context can be viewed in terms of its larger frame where each society, as a situated linguistic community, operates with its own social structure, speech behaviour or value systems. Martin Pütz, Justyna A. Robinson and Monika Reif (2012, pp. 247-249) submit that “in sociolinguistics, the categorization of people, their relationships and social activities make up what is called “social structure”, i.e. social groups, networks and social situations. The main task of sociolinguistics is to relate variation in language to variation in social structure, whereby an individual’s use of language is determined by that individual’s recognition – their perception of the social groups and networks around them.” The implication of this is that sender-meaning is determined by the pragmatics of the social context. The pragmasociolinguistics of discourse explains sender-meaning within the framework of Ogden and Richards theorizing on the concept of meaning. In this regard, language use is immersed in reference-making and inference-making, where linguistic and extralinguistic constraints impinge on the encoding and decoding of expressions or utterances in discourse. Geoffrey, N. L. & Michael, H. S. (1981) report Ogden and Richards view on the concept of meaning:

Perhaps the best known book ever written on semantics, that which C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards published in 1923, had the very title *The Meaning of Meaning*, and contained, on pp. 186-7, a list of as many as twenty-two definitions of the words, taking different non-theoretical starting points. Here ... is a selection of the meanings given:

- an intrinsic property;
 - the other words annexed to a word in the dictionary;
 - the connotation of a word;
 - the place of anything in a system;
 - the practical consequences of a thing in our future experience;
 - that to which the user of a symbol actually refers;
 - that to which the user of a symbol ought to be referring;
 - that to which the user of a symbol believes himself to be referring;
 - that to which the interpreter of a symbol
- (a) refers
 - (b) believes himself to be referring
 - (c) believes the user to be referring.

4.4 Pragmatics as Reference-making in Discourse

In the performance of discrete speech acts such as acknowledging, condemning, praising, ascribing, informing, describing, persuading, etc., discourse participants make references to people, things and phenomena in the real world, as they apply to an on-going communication. According to Strawson (1950), “‘referring’ is not something an expression does; it is something that someone can use an expression to do.” Indeed, language use is essentially speakers’ illocutionary intents, and the effects of such intents on addressees. This view is in tandem with Austin (1962, p. 119) who states that “in saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of

the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons; and it may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them ... we shall call the performance of an act of this kind the performance of perlocutionary act or perlocution ...”

4.5 Pragmatics as Organized Discourse

The participants, their language use, their audience and the setting of discourse determine the way a communicative event operates. In this sense, discourse is a structured and organized human communication. This explains why it can be analyzed to reveal the systematic nature of natural (human) communication (Note 2). The message-driven organization of linguistic stretches produces textual tie, cohesion and coherence towards effective communication. Deborah Schiffrin, cited in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (ibid: p. 54) submit that “the production of coherent discourse is an interactive process that requires speakers to draw upon several different types of communicative knowledge that complement more code-based grammatical knowledge of sound, form, and meaning per se. Two aspects of communicative knowledge closely related to one another are express and social: the ability to use language to display personal and social identities, to convey attitudes and perform actions, and to negotiate relationships between self and others. Others include a cognitive ability to represent concepts and ideas through language and a textual ability to organize forms, and convey meanings, within units of language longer than a single sentence.” Choice of words facilitates textual tie, cohesion and coherence. These features impinge on the organization of discourse because they are meaning-determining elements. Diane Blakemore, cited in Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen and Heidi E. Hamilton (ibid: p. 102) states that “coherence relations are structural relations which hold in virtue of formal properties of utterances.” The linguistic knowledge of speakers of a language influences the socio-pragmatics of language use. For example, to deviate from literal to non-literal language or interpret these two forms, mastery of the grammar and vocabulary of language is crucial. Inference theories are instructive in the explanation of strategies for processing the meaning of literal and non-literal propositions in discourse. Levinson (1983) submits:

... there are, therefore, a number of distinct inference theories, but they share the following essential properties:

- The literal meaning and the literal force of an utterance is computed by, and available to, participants;
- For an utterance-trigger, i.e. some indication that the literal meaning and/or literal force is conversationally inadequate in the context and must be ‘repaired’ by some inference;
- There must be specific principles or rules of inference that will derive, from the literal meaning and force and the context, the relevant indirect force;
- There must be pragmatically sensitive linguistic rules or constraints, which will govern the occurrence of, for example, pre-verbal ‘please’ in both direct and indirect request.

5. Conclusion

This study examines pragmatics in relation to two other fields of language study: sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, and contends that pragmatics is indeed, pragma-sociolinguistics of discourse; in this regard, emphasis is on context, linguistic conventions and elements of discourse. Communication is a crucial component of the relationship between language and society. Society captures humans and social structures. Effective communication is, within these phenomena, “the successful transaction of sender-meaning via linguistic and extra-linguistic properties of texts”. The use of language in written and spoken communication is essentially the performance of actions through discrete communicative strategies. Thus, sender-meaning is context-sensitive across discourse genres. Hinging on social and contextual underpinnings of texts, pragmatics and discourse analysis reveal meaning in language-use as being principle-driven. Patrick Griffiths (2006) submits that “sender meaning is the meaning that the speaker or writer intends to convey by means of an utterance. Sender meaning is something that addressees continually have to make informed guesses about. Addressees can give indications, in their own next utterance, of their interpretation (or by performing other actions ...). Pragmatic, social and linguistic contexts enable participants of discourse to process sender-meaning, thus preventing pragmatic failure which as cited in Adeyemi (2000, p. 77), “... refers to the inability to understand what is meant by what is said.” Conclusively, in elucidating pragmatics as pragma-sociolinguistics of discourse, this study contends that language use, being a social phenomenon, emphasizes topic, message, context, participants, organizational pattern, coherence and cohesion.

Notes

Note 1. The notion of direction-of-fit (cf. Searle *ibid*) shows the relationship between language and its socio-pragmatic perspective.

Note 2. Johnstone, cited in Olugbenga Ibileye (*ibid*: 6-7) provides insights on the form of discourse in terms of participant, topic and context:

We obviously need to think about what our ‘text’ is about, since clearly what a person is talking about has a bearing on what is said and how it is said. We also need to think about who said it, or who wrote it or signed it, who is thought, in its particular socio-cultural context, to be responsible for what it says, who the intended audience was and who the actual hearers or readers were, because who the participants in a situation are and how their roles are defined clearly influence what gets said and how. We need to think about what motivated the text, about how it fits into the set of things people in its context conventionally do with discourse, and about what its medium (or media) of production has to do with what it is like. We need to think about the language it is in, what that language encourages speakers and writers to do and what it is relatively difficult to do in that language. We need to think about the text’s structure, and how it fits into larger structures of sets of texts and sets of interactions.

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