

Pragmatic Features of Language Units

Kobilova Nargisa Sulaymonovna ¹, Azimova Maftuna ²

¹ Associate professor of English linguistics department of Bukhara state university

² Master student of English linguistics department of Bukhara state university

Annotation:

This article provides an overview of key pragmatic features that contribute to the understanding of language beyond its literal meaning. It explores concepts such as deixis, implicature, presupposition, and speech acts, demonstrating their crucial role in interpreting meaning within specific contexts and social situations. By illustrating these concepts with examples, the article highlights the importance of pragmatics in effective communication, emphasizing how meaning is constructed not solely through words, but also through the interplay of context and social factors.

Keywords: Pragmatics, language units, deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, context.

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that deals with how context influences the interpretation of meaning in communication. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meanings of words and sentences, pragmatics concerns itself with the use of language in social contexts, including the speaker's intentions, the relationship between the interlocutors, and the shared knowledge within a conversation. Language units, whether they are single words, phrases, or full sentences, carry not just semantic content but also pragmatic features that shape how they are understood. This paper explores these pragmatic features, showing how they contribute to effective and meaningful communication. One of the most fundamental pragmatic features of language units is deixis.

Deictic expressions are words or phrases that cannot be understood without reference to the context in which they are used. Common deictic categories include person deixis (e.g., pronouns like "I," "you"), time deixis (e.g., "now," "then"), and place deixis (e.g., "here," "there"). For example, the sentence "I'll meet you here tomorrow" contains multiple deictic elements that require contextual information to be interpreted correctly. The word "I" refers to the speaker, "you" to the listener, "here" to a particular location, and "tomorrow" to a specific time. Without knowledge of the speaker, listener, location, and time of utterance, the sentence would be meaningless. As explained previously, deixis refers to words or phrases whose meaning depends on the context of the

utterance, specifically the speaker's location and time of speaking. It involves "pointing" to elements in the world using language. For example, "I am here now" has different meanings depending on the speaker, location, and time. Deixis is essential for understanding how language functions in specific situations, as it allows for efficient reference and contextualization. Thus, deixis demonstrates the inherent dependency of language on context.

Implicature refers to the meaning that is implied but not directly stated by the speaker. This feature plays a crucial role in allowing speakers to convey more than what they explicitly say, relying on the listener's ability to infer additional information from the context. Implicature is often governed by conversational maxims, as described by philosopher H.P. Grice in his theory of conversational implicature. For instance, consider the following exchange: A: "Are you going to the party tonight?"

B: "I have a lot of work to do."

B's response does not explicitly answer the question, but it implies that B will not attend the party due to work obligations. This type of inference allows speakers to communicate more efficiently, avoiding unnecessary explicitness and relying on shared assumptions.

Implicature refers to the unspoken meaning conveyed in an utterance, beyond its literal meaning. It's what the speaker intends to communicate, even if not explicitly stated. For example, if someone says, "It's hot in here," they might be implying that they want someone to open a window. Implicature relies on shared knowledge and understanding between speakers, as well as the context of the conversation.

Presupposition involves background assumptions that a speaker assumes the listener already accepts as true. These assumptions are embedded within the structure of an utterance and remain unchanged regardless of whether the utterance is positive or negative. For example, the sentence "John has stopped smoking" presupposes that John used to smoke. Even if the sentence were negated—"John hasn't stopped smoking"—the presupposition remains that John once smoked. Presuppositions often go unnoticed in conversation, but they are crucial for understanding the speaker's intended meaning and the shared knowledge within a communicative act. Presupposition refers to the background assumptions or beliefs that are taken for granted in an utterance. These assumptions are often not explicitly stated but are assumed to be true by both the speaker and the listener. For example, the sentence, "Your brother is coming to visit" presupposes that the listener has a brother. Presuppositions are important for understanding the hidden meanings in communication, as they reveal unspoken assumptions and shared knowledge.

Speech act theory, pioneered by philosophers J.L. Austin and John Searle, suggests that when people use language, they are not just saying things but doing things. A speech act is an utterance that serves a function in communication, such as making a request, giving an order, making a promise, or offering an apology. Each speech act has three components: the locutionary act (the actual utterance), the illocutionary act (the intended function of the utterance), and the perlocutionary act (the effect on the listener). For ex, the utterance "Can you pass the salt?" might appear as a simple question, but pragmatically, it functions as a request. The speaker's intention is not to inquire about the listener's ability to pass the salt but to actually prompt the listener to do so. All pragmatic features of language units are context-dependent. The meaning of an utterance often changes depending on who is speaking, to whom they are speaking, where the conversation is taking place, and what knowledge is shared between the participants. For ex, the word "bank" can refer to a financial institution or the side of a river. Without additional context, the meaning remains unclear. However, in a sentence like "I'm going to the bank to withdraw some money," the context clarifies that the speaker is referring to a financial institution. Similarly, phrases like "What's up?" or "How are you?" can have different pragmatic meanings depending on the formality of the

situation and the relationship between the interlocutors. Speech acts are actions performed through language. They go beyond simply conveying information and encompass actions like requesting, promising, apologizing, or thanking. For example, saying "Please close the door" is not just a statement but a request. Understanding the intended speech act is crucial for effective communication, as it allows us to correctly interpret the speaker's intention and respond appropriately.

Context plays a crucial role in pragmatics. It encompasses the social, cultural, and situational factors surrounding an utterance. Context includes: The physical setting of the communication, the relationship between the speaker and the listener, the knowledge and beliefs shared by both parties, the purpose and goals of the conversation.

Pragmatic features of language units are essential for effective communication, enabling speakers to convey meaning that goes beyond the literal interpretation of words. By relying on deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and context, language users can achieve greater efficiency and subtlety in their interactions. Understanding these pragmatic features is key for anyone studying language, as they reveal the complex interplay between language, meaning, and context.

The Importance of Pragmatic Features is that understanding these pragmatic features is crucial for effective communication. By recognizing the hidden meanings, assumptions, and intentions behind utterances, we can interpret meaning accurately, respond appropriately to others, navigate social situations with ease, communicate our intentions effectively. Pragmatics, therefore, is a vital aspect of human language and communication. It goes beyond the literal meaning of words, revealing the complex interplay of context, social factors, and speaker intentions that shape meaning and influence communication.

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