UNIT 2: SEMANTICS

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the concept of semantics as the study of meaning
- appreciate the term meaning and its elements
- discuss the various sources of meaning of words
- appreciate the concept of sense relations

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall discuss the concept of semantics which is a major branch of linguistics devoted to the study of meaning in language. The focus being on meaning, we shall begin by referring to the authoritative work of Ogden and Richards(1923) titled *The Meaning of Meaning* as starting point that will lead us to a study of the different elements of meaning in the light of the approach of G. N. Leech (1981) in terms of conceptual meaning, connotative meaning and so on. Then we shall move on to an exploration of the different sources of meaning in terms of *lexical meaning, syntactic meaning, intonation meaning and socio-cultural meaning* by stating how the sources of meaning can be traced back to the words themselves, to the syntactic structure, to the kind of intonation used in spoken discourse and the socio-cultural situation in which the utterance is made. We close the unit by a discussion on the sense relations of words in terms of *antonymy, synonymy* and so on.

2.3 WHAT IS MEANING?

Let us begin this section by looking at the word *meaning* in the general sense that most of us have been using it in our common language use. Here are two sentences:

A : What is the meaning of the word *exasperating*?

B : The meaning is *annoying*.

From these two sentences we understand that the word *annoying* is an equivalent and much more common term than *exasperating* besides being easier to understand. In other words, the term *meaning* refers to an equivalent term that is much more common and easier to understand.

The question "*what is meaning?"* has been engaging the attention of philosophers for over 2000 years. It has been felt that the physical world gives us items, actions, responses, qualities, etc., the cognitive world conceives them in terms of ideas and also associates them with other items. The linguistic world labels the items as conceived by the cognitive

world. However, modern linguists like Lyons (1981) do not think that no one has yet produced a satisfactory answer to it. One reason may be that the question, in the form in which it is posed is unanswerable. Their thinking began from the issue of the relationship between words and the objects which words represent. Hence it has been suggested that instead of posing the question "What is Meaning?" a more appropriate poser would be "What is the meaning of meaning?"

Two literary critics C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards in their famous book titled *The Meaning of Meaning* were able to list no less than sixteen different meanings of the term that have been favoured by reputed scholars as observed by the references made to them. In this small module, it may not be possible to investigate all these popular and scientific definitions of meaning but a brief look at a few of them can be illuminating for the study of meaning, for example,

(a) an intrinsic property of something
(b) other words related to that word in a dictionary
(c) the connotations of a word
(d) the thing to which the speaker of that word refers
(e) the thing to which the speaker of that word *should* refer
(f) the thing to which the speaker of that word believes to be referring
(g) the thing to which the hearer of that word believes is being referred to.

These definitions approach different ways in which meaning is understood. Taking up some of the above definitions of meaning, we can identify the different elements of meaning.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Answer the following questions:

(a) State briefly what you understand by the expression: "The connotation of a word".

(b) Briefly explain how connotation of a word is different from denotation of a word.

2.4 ELEMENTS OF MEANING

We use language either in our speech or writing to express meaning so that what we say or write is understood by the listener or the reader. Meaning in a general sense takes care of almost everything that takes place between the sender and receiver of a message through language. In this section we shall discuss seven different elements of meaning as propounded by Geoffrey Leech. These different elements can also be referred to as the aspects of meaning:

2.4.1 Conceptual Meaning

The term conceptual meaning, also called denotative meaning is basically the literal meaning of a word indicating the idea or concept to which it refers. A concept can be described by analysing the different components that constitute the concept. These components can be analysed by making use of three term labels as follows:

1.	man	= +	human	–	female	+	adult
2.	sow	= +	porcine	+	female	+	adult
3.	boy	= +	human	–	female	–	adult
4.	cow	= +	bovine	+	female	+	adult

If any of these conceptual features change, the concept also changes. For example, in 3 above, if ' - female' is changed to '+ female', the concept boy changes to girl. Thus we see that the change of one minimal quality changes the concept.

2.4.2 Connotative Meaning

While conceptual meaning is concerned with the core meaning of the word or concept, connotative meaning is the meaning which is attributed to a given word or concept. These attributes come into use over a period of time in a particular culture. They may change with change in time. For example, while the conceptual meaning of bull is that it is + bovine – female + adult, the connotative meaning is that it is a sacred animal. Connotative meaning is not part of what is conceived but what is perceived. The fact that the cow or the bull is a sacred animal is part of the connotative meaning of the word.

2.4.3 Stylistic Meaning and Affective Meaning

Stylistic meaning is the meaning conveyed by a word or an expression regarding the socio-cultural background of the users of the language. Stylistic meaning derives from the style in which something is written or spoken and of the relationship between the participants of the spoken or written text. The meaning of a formal, semi-formal or informal utterance is essentially stylistic meaning. For example, the informality associated with the word 'fag' for a cigarette is the stylistic meaning of the word. On the other and affective meaning is the meaning conveyed by the personal feelings or attitudes of a listener to a statement or an utterance. For example, the meaning of *"Why are you making a noise?"* should be understood as a warning to be silent.

2.4.4 Reflected and Collocative Meaning

Reflective meaning is the effect of one meaning on another meaning of the same word. For example, let us take the word 'simple', which has several meanings notably *plain, natural,* and *naive.* In the statement "His responses are simple", the meaning of the word may be expressed as *plain,* though other meaning especially *naive* may be also reflected. On the

other hand, collocative meaning refers to the meaning acquired by a word under the influence of words which it co-occurs with. For example, the meaning of *pretty* gets specified with *girl, woman, flower, garden, colour*, etc. whereas the meaning of *handsome* gets specified with *boy, man,* etc.

2.4.5 Thematic Meaning

Thematic meaning is the meaning conveyed by the way in which a speaker or writer organizes the message in terms of ordering, focus and emphasis. It is often felt that an utterance in the active voice has a meaning different from that in its corresponding passive voice.

(a) The police arrested the thief.

(b) The thief was arrested by the police.

Certainly these have different communicative values in that they suggest different contexts. The active sentence answers the question *"Whom did the police arrest?"* whereas, the passive sentence answers the question *"Was the thief arrested?"* The themes are different.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q2. Answer the questions briefly:

(a) Give the componential analysis of the following words: boar, calf, stallion

(b) Write short notes on: stylistic meaning, thematic meaning.

2.5 SOURCES OF MEANING

In this section we shall look at the different sources of meaning. It is an interesting fact of semantics that the major part of the meaning of words that we use in our speech and writing is partly located in the language (code) that we use and partly in the language user (coder).

The sources of meaning located in the language or code that we use include three types of meaning namely, *lexical meaning, syntactic meaning* and *phonological meaning*. On the other hand, the sources of

meaning located in the language user or coder include *socio-cultural meaning*.

Lexical meaning is derived from the analysis of the components of a word. We call it componential analysis. It is an approach to the study of meaning which analyses a word into a set of meaning components as we had shown in our discussion on conceptual meaning at 2.4.1.

Grammatical meaning can be of two types namely: (i) functional relations of their constituents and (ii) the function of a component in the structure of a larger unit as exemplified below:

John called her a fool.

John called her a taxi.

In sentence 1, the grammatical function of *her* is direct object in the structure S+V+O+O whereas in sentence 2, the grammatical function of *her* is indirect object (John called a taxi for her). Besides, word-order can reflect different meanings. The function of John in a sentence like '*John met the minister'* is not the same as in the sentence '*The minister met John'*; there are functional differences.

Phonological meaning is the meaning of an utterance derived from the kind of intonation used by a speaker in making the utterance. You will note even from the intonation patterns used in your mother tongue that yes-no type questions are uttered with a rising tone. If an utterance like '*He came yesterday?'* is uttered with a rising tone, we get the meaning that it is a question.

Socio-cultural meaning is the meaning that is derived from the shared knowledge on the use of language, social behaviour, etc. of a speech community sharing the same socio-cultural ethos. For example, when a person on seeing another, makes the utterance "*Good morning"*, the utterance may be interpreted as a *greeting.* We find meanings of such expressions from our socio-cultural situations.

2.6 LEXICAL SEMANTICS: SENSE RELATIONS

The word *lexical* is the adjective form of the word *lexeme*. The word *lexeme* is used to refer to the smallest unit in the meaning system of a language

that can be distinguished from other similar units. A lexeme is an abstract unit and can occur in different forms in actual spoken or written sentences and is regarded as the same lexeme even when it takes prefixes or suffixes. In grammar we distinguish two kinds of words: lexical words and grammatical or function words. For example, the words *take, took, taking* and *taken* would belong to the one lexeme *take*. The term lexical words, also called content words, include mainly nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs whereas function words are words that have little meaning of their own e.g. prepositions, conjunctions, articles, etc.

Words in a language are organized in certain laid down syntactic principles that form the grammar of the language. A word in a language may have two meanings – lexical meaning and sentence meaning. We shall discuss lexical meaning here. In our attempt to describe lexical meaning, our attempt will be to explain different meaning relations that exist among different lexemes. These relations can be described in terms of *antonymy, synonymy, polysemy* and *hyponymy*.

2.6.1 Antonymy

The term antonymy (noun) which is a variant of the word antonym (noun), refers to the oppositeness of a word in meaning to another word. The oppositeness of words in English can be studied in terms of their *gradability, non-gradability* and their *relational oppositeness*.

Gradable antonyms can be best explained in terms of pairs of words like *high-low, wide-narrow, big-small, old-young,* and so on. All these words given in italics are adjectives and can be seen in terms of degrees of the quality involved. Thus, one building may be high or very high and one building may be higher than another while relatively, another may be the highest of the three. We have gradation of height, width, size, quality etc. One road may be wide or very wide, another may be wider than the other and another may be the widest of the three. When we refer to something as wide or high, we have a norm of what makes us to say that something is wide or

high or big. This accounts for the fact that a small elephant is bigger than the biggest mouse.

Non-gradable antonyms include pairs of words that do not have gradability. These antonyms cannot be graded. They are also known as *binary opposites*. Examples include *male-female, married-single, alive-dead* and so on. A word in each pair is complementary to the other. When we say that a child is male, it implies that it is not female. These pairs are non-gradable; they cannot be described in terms of degrees. They do not have intermediate terms showing gradation unlike *hot-cool-cold.*

Antonyms referred to as *relational opposites* are found in pairs like *above-below, lend-borrow, debtor-creditor,* etc. These terms in pairs are interdependent; one pre-supposes the other. Kinship terms like *husband-wife, father-mother, son-daughter, uncle-aunt* etc also belong to this category.

2.6.2 Synonymy

Synonymy refers to words having the same meaning. They are called synonyms. It is a fact of language that two words with the same meaning rarely exist; one of them may take different shades of meaning or may die a natural death. Words we call synonyms are *fully synonymous* if all their meanings are identical. Such types of synonyms are rare in English. Many of the words listed in dictionaries of synonyms are concerned with what John Lyons calls *near synonymy* or *partial synonymy*.

Absolute synonymy or full synonymy or complete synonymy would mean only those words or expressions that are synonymous if all their meanings are identical; partial synonymy are synonymous in certain context but not in all contexts.

Dictionaries of synonyms treat the words *big* and *large* as synonyms. However, they vary in a number of meanings that they assign to each. In one meaning exemplified by *"He built a large/big house"*, the two words are synonymous. Whether they are completely synonymous will depend upon whether the two words can be used in all other contexts. For example, we can say *"The boy has grown quite big"* but we normally do not say *"The boy*

has grown quite large". Hence, it becomes difficult to say that *big* and *large* are fully synonymous.

It is important to state that some words can collocate with some words, but they do not collocate with others. The word collocation refers to the restrictions on how words can be used together regularly. We do not say that *"You are making a large mistake"*; *big* collocates with mistake, *large* does not. If words have collocation restrictions, they are not fully synonymous.

2.6.3 Homonymy and Polysemy

Homonymy is defined as different words with the same form. The word *bank* meaning 'a financial institution' shares the same form of *bank* to refer to 'the side of a river'. The word *bank* meaning financial institution and the word *bank* meaning the side of a river are two different words because they have different meanings. Dictionaries list them as *bank 1* and *bank 2*. These two words are homonyms because

- their forms are unrelated in meaning
- their forms are identical
- their forms belong to the same part of speech.

We can draw a distinction between *absolute homonymy* and *partial homonymy.* We discussed the two words – *bank 1* and *bank 2* are absolute homonyms because they share the three characteristics identified above.

Here is another example. The word *sole* to mean the bottom of the foot or a shoe and the word *sole* to mean a kind of fish are absolute homonyms because these two words also share the same three characteristics identified above; we call them *sole 1* and *sole 2*.

But there are many different kinds of words that belong to the category of partial homonymy. For example, *find* and *found* share the same form *found*, but not *finds, finding* or *founds*, *founding,* etc; and *found* as a form of 'find' is not syntactically equivalent to *found* as a form of 'found'.

2.6.4 Hyponymy

Hyponymy refers to the relationship between two words, in which the meaning of one of the words includes the meaning of the other. The words *animal* and *cow* are related in such a way that *cow* refers to a type of animal. Animal is a general term that includes cow and other types of animals like cat, dog, and so on. The specific term cow is called hyponym and the general term is called *superordinate*. Read the following list of superordinates and hyponyms:

Superordinates	**hyponyms**
Vehicle	car, lorry, van, bus
Furniture	chair, table, bed
Vegetable	potato, cabbage, carrot
Fruit	apple, mango, banana
Move	walk, run, swim, fly
Colour	blue, green, white, yellow

The list shows that the relationship between the words under superordinates and those under hyponyms is one of hyponymy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Answer the following questions:

(a) Give an example of a pair of gradable antonyms by showing their grades.

(b) Give the hyponyms of the superordinate terms: *red* and *colour.*



2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we discussed the concept of semantics as a study of meaning in language. We began by referring to the authoritative work of Ogden and Richards titled *The Meaning of Meaning.* We discussed the terms *conceptual meaning, connotative meaning, stylistic meaning, affective*

meaning, reflected meaning, collocative meaning and *thematic meaning.* We moved on to an exploration of the different sources of meaning in terms of *lexical meaning, syntactic meaning, phonological meaning and socio-cultural meaning* by stating how the sources of meaning can be traced back to the words themselves, to the syntactic structure, to the kind of intonation used in spoken discourse and the socio-cultural situation in which the utterance is made. Lastly, we discussed the sense relations of words in terms of *antonymy, synonymy* and so on.



2.8 FURTHER READING

1. Leech, G.N. (1981). *Semantics,* Penguin.
2. Lyons, John. (2002). *Language and Linguistics: An Introduction,* Cambridge.
3. Ogden, C.K. & Richards, I.A. (1923). *The Meaning of Meaning,* London, Kegan Paul (10th edn).
4. Palmer, F.R. (1981). *Semantics,* Second Edn. Cambridge.

2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1.

(a) The connotation of a word refers to the idea suggested by a word in addition to its main meaning. For example, the main meaning of *mouse* is that it is a *rodent* but the connotative meaning is *timidity*.

(b) Denotation is the act of naming something with a word. It is the act of labelling an item. The physical world gives the item, the cognitive world conceives it in terms of an idea and the linguistic world labels it with a name.

Ans to Q2.

(a) boar = + porcine – female + adult
calf = + bovine – adult
stallion = + equine – female + adult

(b) Stylistic meaning – see 2.4.3.

Thematic meaning – see 2.4.5.

Ans to Q3.

(a) hot- cold; gradation: *very hot—hot—cool — cold – very cold*

(b) red = scarlet, crimson, vermillon

colour = red, orange, blue, etc.



2.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give brief answers to the following:

(a) Give componential analyses of: *ox, woman, dog.*

(b) Pairs of antonyms like *husband-wife* are called _____.

(Fill in the blank)

(c) Give the hyponyms of the superordinate term *tree*.

Q2. Write short notes on:

(a) Gradable antonyms

(b) Collocation restrictions

(c) Stylistic meaning

Q3. Answer the following questions:

(a) Write a note on the sources of meaning.

(b) Draw a distinction between conceptual meaning and connotative meaning.

(c) Bring out the distinctiveness of homonymy and polysemy with illustrative examples.

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UNIT 3: PRAGMATICS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.9 Further Reading
3.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
3.11 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- understand the term pragmatics in relation to semantics
- appreciate the scope of pragmatics as a distinct field of study
- understand the principles underlying conversation in real-life situations
- distinguish the language of conversation from the language of written discourse.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit begins by drawing a distinction between semantics and pragmatics that are two distinct fields of study and yet complementary to each other in view of their concern with meaning. Next, the unit provides a workable definition of the term *pragmatics* as the study of language usage in conversation. By taking the definition, we proceed to study the scope of

pragmatics. The unit takes into account a number of parameters of pragmatics beginning with *deixis*, a term for a word or a phrase which directly relate an utterance to a time, place or person for an encoding of the meaning of an utterance. Other areas of concern in this unit include conversational implicature wherein we refer to the four conversational maxims that is, conversational strictures, proposed by H.P. Grice (1981) in his *Presupposition and Conversational Implicature*. In a section on presuppositions, we consider presuppositions as assumptions made about the context of a sentence or utterance that are necessary to make it verifiable or appropriate so as to discover the way meaning is communicated. Lastly, we take up the structure of performatives which are utterances that perform and not just inform and show their difference from that of constatives that are utterances meant for informing.

3.3 THE SCOPE OF PRAGMATICS

In the previous unit you were introduced to the concept of semantics as the scientific study of meaning. It may interest you to know that pragmatics is also concerned with meaning. But there is a difference between the uses of the term *meaning* in these two fields of study. In semantics, meaning is defined purely as a property of expressions in a given language, in abstraction from particular situations, speakers or hearers. On the other hand, meaning in pragmatics is defined relatively to a speaker or user of the language in a context of a given situation. In other words, semantics is a study of what meaning is and how it operates whereas pragmatics is a field of language study concerning how during a social conversation people experience, make sense of and react to the way meaning is communicated through the language used. Thus, we can state that semantics and pragmatics are distinct though complementary and interrelated fields of study in meaning.

From the distinction made between semantics and pragmatics in their concern with meaning, it appears that the term pragmatics can be defined as a field of language study from the point of view of the user of the

language. This use is governed by (a) the choices of language items that a person makes, (b) the constraints that is encountered in using language and (c) the effects the person's use of language has on the other participants in the act of communication. In brief, pragmatics is *the study of language usage in social interaction*.

This definition helps us to appreciate the scope of pragmatics. The scope of pragmatics is the study of language usage from a socio-functional perspective. We can call it a communicative perspective. Such a perspective requires that the scope of pragmatics should concern itself with the following parameters:

- The first parameter is the context dependent aspect of language structure. It means that the meaning of an utterance is always dependent on the context or the situation in which the utterance is made.
- The second parameter is the principles of language usage. It means that there are certain aspects of language that help a listener to encode the meaning of an utterance.

The scope of pragmatics includes the study of those aspects of language that require reference to the users of the language for their meaning. One of the major aspects of natural languages that require reference is the study of *deictic* or *indexical* words like the pronoun "I" and "you" which we take up in 3.4 in this unit. Secondly, another scope of pragmatics that has been considered here is that pragmatics deal with the study of *conversational implicature,* an area taken up in 3.5 here. Thirdly, a scope of pragmatics is the study of *presupposition*, a term that refers to what a speaker or hearer presupposed through references drawn from the utterance in the process of a conversational act. Moreover, the scope of pragmatics is a study of *performatives* as part of *speech act theory.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Give brief answers to the following questions:

(a) Give a definition of the term pragmatics.

(b) State the two parameters that the scope of pragmatics must concern with.

(c) State the scope of pragmatics in about 50 words.

3.4 DEIXIS

The term *deixis* is used to refer to a word or a phrase in communication which directly relates an utterance to a time, place or object. Borrowed from a Greek word, the term is used for pointing or indicating something to a listener. This is done by the use of demonstratives like *this, that, these, those,* first and second person pronouns *I, we, you*, tense, specific time and place adverbs like *here, there, now,* etc. and a variety of other grammatical features tied directly to the utterance.

Basically, deixis concerns the ways in which we draw meaning from a piece of utterance in a speech event. In deixis the meaning does not lie in the sentence or the utterance but in the context of the situation. Let us take a situation in which speaker A says to B: *"Look at that!"* In order to encode the meaning of the deixis 'that', the listener B will turn his/her attention to whatever A means by 'that'. The interpretation of the deixis lies outside the text in the context of the situation. Thereby, deixis concerns ways by which we interpret or decode utterances. Deictic information is of immense importance in our understanding of an utterance.

Let us take an example. Suppose a person provides the following information to you in the form of a small note which you discover on your table. How will you react to this note?

(1) See me in fifteen minutes from now. I'll be back by then.

You will not know when this note was sent to you and whether the fifteen minute time frame has ended or not for we do not know when the time count from *now* has begun nor do we know whether the person has returned so that the meeting can be materialized. It becomes difficult to deduce relevant information from such a sentence. The reason is that the deixis is missing.

In order to deduce meaning of a piece of text, either spoken or written, the text must directly concern the relationship between the structure of languages and the contexts in which they are used. We should be able to *encode*, that is, derive meaning from different aspects of the circumstances surrounding the utterance, within the utterance itself. Now let us look at two

other examples. Imagine that you are saying these to a person at a given place:

(2) Here is the pen that I borrowed from you yesterday.

(3) Don't stand here, go over there.

The first utterance uses the deixis *here*; it specifically points to the pen that the person had borrowed from the hearer the previous day and now he is returning it. The second utterance directly relate to places. The speaker indicates the places by the use of the two adverbs *here* and *there.* Thus we see that deixis establishes meaning of an utterance by decoding a reference given in the form of first and second person pronouns, demonstratives, specific time and place adverbs and a variety of grammatical features.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q2. Give brief answers to the following questions:

(a) Explain briefly the term deixis.

(b) State how deixis establishes meaning of an utterance.

3.5 CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURE

The term *conversational implicature* briefly referred to as *implicature* is used in pragmatics to mean the meaning of an utterance which can be deduced from the form of the utterance on the basis of certain *co-operative principles*. The co-operative principles govern the efficiency and normal acceptability of conversation. The source of the pragmatic meaning drawn through inference lies on the structure of the concerned utterance. For example, when the sentence *"The front door is open"* is used to mean a request to close the front door, we discover some general principles of shared interaction.

To illustrate co-operative principle, we refer to the conversational implicature laid down by H.P. Grice as conversational maxims. Grice identifies these maxims as guidelines or general principles underlying the

efficient use of language in conversation. The co-operative principle follows the following four maxims:

(a) The maxim of Quality

Make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

(i) do not say what you believe to be false

(ii) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(b) The maxim of Quantity

(i) Make your contribution informative enough for the current purpose of the exchange

(ii) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(c) The maxim of Relevance

(i) Make your contribution relevant to the context

(ii) Do not say things that are not relevant for the present situation.

(d) The maxim of Manner

Be perspicuous, and specifically:

(i) avoid obscurity

(ii) avoid ambiguity

(iii) be brief

(iv) be orderly.

The value of these maxims is that they provide conversational strictures; they specify what speakers have to do in order to converse in an efficient, rational and co-operative way. For example, one stricture is that participants in a conversational act should speak sincerely, relevantly and clearly while providing information.

Secondly, conversational implicature can provide some explicit account of how it is possible to mean more than what is actually said. To illustrate the statement, here is an example of an exchange between two persons A and B:

A: When will father arrive?

B: The train is late by two hours.

The utterance of A is a request for specific information. However, B's response is not directly explicit. We may expect a response that would be something like: "He'll arrive in two hours" or something like that. However,

the answer provided by B is not directly expressed. There is a gap between what was asked and what was said as response. Implicature bridges the gap by giving some account of how the information is encoded. Obviously, father is arriving by train and the train that day is two hours late.

Thirdly, the notion of implicature brings out significant simplification in both structure and context of a sentence to express meaning. Let us examine the conjunction *and* in the following two sentences. While grammar considers *and* as a connective, joining two coordinate clauses, pragmatics would explore the truth condition of the clauses when they are interchanged and try to find meanings of the word *and* as to whether they have the same implicature in each context.

(4) The man locked the door and walked down the stairs.

(5) John bought a book and Mary bought an umbrella.

The sense of *and* in sentences (4) and (5) seems to be rather different. Unlike as in (5) where *and* is a plain connective, in (4), it carries the meaning of 'and then'. Hence, it is possible to rephrase sentence (5) without affecting the meaning as

(6) Mary bought an umbrella and John bought a book.

But we cannot interchange the coordinate clauses in sentence (4) without affecting the meaning. We cannot have a sentence like the following:

(7) The man walked down the stairs and locked the door.

On the other hand, in sentence (5), there is no 'and then' sense and hence, it implies that the whole sentence in its totality is true. The rephrasing of the two coordinating clauses does not affect the conceptual meaning of the sentence. What is being implied through these examples is that implicature helps in making clear those natural language expressions which would otherwise be ambiguous.

Fourthly, implicature appears to be helpful in accounting for some closely related concepts like *well, anyway, by the way* and so on. If we try to find meanings of these words, which are essentially *discourse markers*, we shall find ourselves referring to the pragmatic mechanism that produce implicatures. For example, in the midst of a conversational act, let us suppose that a person A asks B the following question:

(8) "By the way, what are you doing these days?"

From the discourse marker "by the way", B gets the hint that A has deviated from his/her earlier topic of conversation. We see certain pragmatic rules operating in the use of discourse markers in utterances.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Answer the following questions:

(a) Briefly explain co-operative principle.

(b) Explain the term maxim of Manner.

3.6 PRESUPPOSITION

When a person named A gifts a book she had recently published to a friend B, it appears that A presupposes B still reads books and would surely like to read her recent book. In this statement, the word 'presupposes' is used to mean 'assumes'. In pragmatics, the word *presupposition* is used as a concept to refer to assumptions made about the context of a sentence or utterance that is necessary to make it verifiable or appropriate or both so as to discover the way meaning is communicated.

A sentence or an utterance must contain a sense as well as a reference. A well-formed sentence carries a sense, but if it lacks reference, it fails to have a truth value. Let us look at the following sentences:

(9) Dilip has a sister.

(10) Dilip has a female sibling.

(11) Dilip's parents have more than one child.

(12) Dilip exists.

Each of these sentences is well-formed and contains some sense. But the truth value of these sentences is what we must look for now. We can say that

(a) If sentence 8 is a true sentence, sentence 9 is also a true sentence.

(b) If sentence 8 is false, then sentence 9 is also false.

The relationship between these two sentences (8) and (10) is one of entailment because if sentence (8) is true, sentence (10) is true too. But if sentence (8) is false, sentence (10) is not necessarily false: Dilip may have a brother. The relationship between sentence (8) and (11) is one of presupposition.

3.7 PERFORMATIVES

The term *performatives* is used to refer to the utterances which perform and not just inform. The following utterances are examples of performatives:

(a) I apologize.

(b) I name this baby Akash.

(c) I give my word.

(d) I warn you that tresspassers will be prosecuted.

(e) I call you a fool.

Each of these sentences perform an act: *apologizing to someone, naming a baby, giving word, warning tresspassers* and *rebuking someone as a fool*. Hence, they are performative sentences or performatives.

On the other hand, there are sentences that inform. These sentences are called constatives. If we say these sentences, we are actually passing on some information.

(f) The baby was named Akash.

(g) Tresspassers will be prosecuted.

(h) You are a fool.

Sentences that do not perform an act but only gives information are constatives. The above are examples of constative sentences.

The performatives are also called illocutionary acts. In the **speech act theory** J.L. Austin (1956) isolates three basic senses in which in saying something one is doing something, and hence, three kinds of acts are simultaneously performed.

(i) Locutionary act: the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference

(j) Illocutionary act: the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. in uttering a sentence

(k) Perlocutionary act: the bringing about of effects on the audience by means of uttering the sentence.

Locutions are required for a communicative act to take place whereas perlocutions create the effects planned. The following sentences illustrate the three types of speech acts:

(l) Be silent. (locutionary act)

(m) He urged me to be silent. (illocutionary act)

(n) He persuaded me to be silent. (perlocutionary act)

In the above examples, sentence (l) reflects a verbal act in "Be silent". Sentence (m) reports the verbal act whereas sentence (n) expresses the effect on the speaker.



3.8 LET US SUM UP

We began this unit by drawing a distinction between semantics and pragmatics that are two distinct fields of study and yet complementary to each other in view of their concern with meaning. Next, we provided a workable definition of the term *pragmatics* as the study of language usage in conversation. By taking the definition, we proceeded to study the scope of pragmatics. The unit takes into account a number of parameters of pragmatics beginning with *deixis*, a term for a word or a phrase which directly relate an utterance to a time, place or person for an encoding of the meaning of the utterance. We also discussed conversational implicature by referring to the four conversational maxims proposed by H.P. Grice (1981) in his *Presupposition and Conversational Implicature*. We further discussed presuppositions by considering presuppositions as assumptions made about the context of a sentence or utterance that are necessary to make it verifiable or appropriate so as to discover the way meaning is communicated. Lastly, we take up the structure of performatives which are utterances that perform and not just inform and show their difference from that of constatives that are utterances meant for informing.



3.9 FURTHER READING

1. Brown, Gillian & Yule, George. (1983) . *Discourse. Analysis,* Cambridge.
2. Leech, Geoffrey N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics,* Longman.
3. Levinson, Stephen C. (2003). *Pagmatics,* Cambridge University Press.

3.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1:

(a) Pragmatics can be defined as the field of language study concerning how during a social conversation people experience, make sense of and react to the way meaning is communicated through language use.

(b) See the two bullet points at 3.3.

(c) Read 3.3 and make a gist in 50 words.

Ans to Q2:

(a) The term 'deixis' is drawn from Greek for pointing or indicating something to a listener. It refers to a word or phrase used in communication which directly relates an utterance to a time, place or object. E.g. Look, *that* is the boy.

(b) Deixis establishes the meaning of an utterance by decoding a reference given in the form of the 1st and 2nd person pronoun, demonstratives, specific time or place, adverbs, etc. from the context of the situation.

Ans to Q3:

(a) The term co-operative principle is derived from the work of the philosopher H.P. Grice and now frequently used in pragmatics to refer to conversational strictures. At its simplest, the principle states that speakers try to co-operate with each other when communicating. They will attempt to follow the four maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner.

(b) By maxim of Manner, Grice refers to the conversational stricture that requires a speaker to avoid obscurity and ambiguity and to be brief and orderly.



3.11 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Give brief answers to the following questions:

(a) Give a definition of pragmatics.

(b) Give the Greek meaning of deixis.

(c) Give an example of locutionary act.

(d) Give an example of illocutionary act.

Q2. Answer the following questions:

(a) Distinguish between semantics and pragmatics.

(b) Distinguish between performatives and constatives.

(c) Explain how deixis helps in finding meanings in a conversational act.

(d) Explain the term ‘discourse marker”.

Q3. Answer the following questions:

(a) Discuss the co-operative principles propounded by Grice and state their importance.

(b) Discuss the value of implicature in a conversational act.

(c) Discuss the importance of presuppositions in conversation.

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