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|  | **Mohamed Kheider University of Biskra** |  |
| **Module: Linguistics** | **Faculty of Arts and Languages** | **Level: First Year LMD** |
| **Semester: 02** | **Department of English & Literature** | **Academic Year: 2020-2021** |
| **Lecture № 6: Pragmatics** |

**A. Definition of Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is the study of the ***invisible*** or ***intended*** meaning of words, phrases and full [sentences](http://www.tlumaczenia-angielski.info/angielski/sentence.htm). Unlike [semantics](http://www.tlumaczenia-angielski.info/linguistics/semantics.htm) which deals with the denotative and connotative meanings of linguistic expressions that can be found in [dictionaries](http://www.tlumaczenia-angielski.info/angielski/dictionary.htm), pragmatics is more concerned with the meanings that these expressions convey when they are used, or with the speaker's intended meaning even when it isn’t actually said or written.

**Example:**

Consider the sentence *Susie is a heavy smoker*. In all circumstances, this sentence carries with it its intrinsic meaning: Susie smokes a large quantity of tobacco every day. This meaning is intrinsic and inseparable. But now consider what happens when this sentence is uttered as a response to two different utterances produced by Jessica in two different contexts.

1. **first** [Jessica is trying to have smoking banned in offices]: *Can you ask Susie to sign this petition?*
2. **second** [Jessica, a medical researcher, is looking for smokers to take part in some medical tests]: *Do you know of anybody I could ask?*

In each case, something very different is being communicated. In the first case, Susie is unlikely to sign the petition, so there’s no point in asking her. In the second, Susie will be a suitable person for your study. Thus, every time the context changes, what is communicated changes as well.

**2. Context**

The interpretation of what meanings the speaker wanted to convey using particular words is often influenced by the context. In pragmatics, two types of context can be differentiated: ***linguistic context*** and ***physical context***:

1. **linguistic context**, sometimes called co-text is the set of words that surround the lexical item in question in the same phrase, or sentence. For example, if the word bank is used in a sentence together with words like *steep* or *overgrown*, we have no problem deciding which type of bank is meant. Or, if we hear someone say *I have to get to the bank to withdraw some cash*, we know from this linguistic context, i.e. *withdraw* and *cash*, which type of bank is intended.
2. **physical context** is the location of a given word, the situation in which it is used, as well as timing, all of which aid proper understating of the words. For instance, if we see the word BANK on the wall of a building in a city, the physical location will inﬂuence our interpretation.

**3.** **Deixis**

There are numerous frequently used words which depend on the physical context for their correct understanding, such as: there, that, it, or tomorrow. Terms like that are known as **deictic expressions**. Depending on what such words refer to they can be classified as **person deixis**: *me, us, ours, this, him, them, that, those, etc*; ***s*patial deixis**: *here, this bed, behind, there, those, yonder*, etc.; and **temporal deixis**: *now, today, this morning, then, yesterday, last week, next year,* then, in an hour, tomorrow*, etc*. However, in pragmatics it is assumed that words do not refer to anything by themselves and it is people who in order to grasp the communicated idea perform an act of identifying what the speaker meant. This act is called **reference**.

**4. Speech Acts**

**a) direct and indirect speech acts**

A speech act is the action performed by a speaker with an utterance. We use the term speech actto describe an action that involves language such as “requesting,” “commanding,” “questioning” or “informing.” In order to understand how utterances can be used to perform actions that are both *direct* and *indirect*, we need to visualize a relationship between the structure of an utterance and the normal function of that utterance, as in

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| **Structures** | **Functions** |
| Interrogative | Question |
| Imperative | Command (Request) |
| Declarative | Statement |

When the interrogative structure is used to fulfill a different purpose, such a situation is described as an [***indirect speech***](http://www.tlumaczenia-angielski.info/angielski/reported.htm) **act** as in the examples below:

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| **sentence** | **structure** | **function** |
| It's cold outside. | declarative | requesting (I request that you shut the door) |
| Do you have to stand in front of TV? | interrogative | commanding (move out of the way!) |
| Could you pass the salt? | interrogative | requesting (I am asking you to pass the salt) |
| Do you know that we are selling meet at 1000 dinars? | interrogative | informing (I am informing you that we have increased the price of meat.)  |

**b) Illocutionary acts and Performative Verbs**

***The illocutionary act*** is the act the speaker performs and while saying an utterance. An illocutionary act **explicitly** realises the speaker’s communicative intention, which can be of hundreds of different kinds, e.g. asserting, stating, reporting, complaining, promising, inquiring, warning, suggesting, ordering, requesting, thanking, greeting, etc. Illocutionary acts can be made fully explicit if we use ***performative verbs***, and as such it stands in the first person singular and can be prefixed by the adverb *hereby*. A performative verb is so called because it explicitly performs an illocutionary act. For example, the verbs underlined in the sentences are performative verbs and they explicitly carry out the illocutionary acts of declaring, naming, asserting, suggesting and promising.

1. I (hereby) declare you man and wife.

2. I (hereby) name this ship the Rainbow.

3. I (hereby) assert that he speaks excellent English.

4. I (hereby) suggest that you should leave.

5. I (hereby) promise that I’ll be there.

The interpretation of the function or illocutionary act represented by an utterance requires knowledge of the situation (physical and linguistic context) in which the utterance is made. Consider, for example, the sentence *Can you play the piano?* This counts as an ordinary question if you say it to someone in a room where there is no piano and the conversation is about who can play what musical instrument. But it will count as a request to play if it is said to someone who is known to be a good pianist, in a room where there is a piano. In other words, we simply cannot say what the function or illocution of a sentence is if we take it in isolation from the context or situation in which it is uttered.