

Pragmatics between Microlinguistic and Macrolinguistic Levels of analysis

Rauf Kareem Mahmood*, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Human Development, Sulaymaniyah, 44001, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Iraq.

Suggested Citation:

Mahmood, R.K. (2016). Pragmatics between Microlinguistic and Macrolinguistic Levels of analysis. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*. 6(3), 78-81.

Received March 21, 2016; revised June 17, 2016; accepted August, 21, 2016.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assist Prof Dr. Ali Rahimi, Bangkok University, Thailand.

© 2016 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

The paper discusses the researcher's new hypothesis to drag pragmatics out of the closed box of microlinguistics and separate it from semantics. To the researcher, pragmatics, if approached objectively, could be relocated as a vital area of interdisciplinary research; otherwise it would shake in the basic foundations of grammar and meaning contrasted with contextual values of utterances. This paper hypothesizes that pragmatics is a macrolinguistic level of analysis, not, as commonly thought, a microlinguistic level. Hence, pragmatics could be more properly listed with Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics, Discourse Analysis, Text linguistics and other relevant areas, not with phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics, though the last, mistakenly to the researcher, is twinned with pragmatics as two faces of the same coin, namely meaning.

Keywords: pragmatics, microlinguistics, macrolinguistics, context, pragmatic concepts and principles.

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Rauf Kareem Mahmood**, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Human Development, Sulaymaniyah, 44001, Kurdistan Region of Iraq, Iraq. *E-mail address:* rauf.mahmood@uhd.edu.iq

1. Introduction

Pragmatics has been defined as a main branch of linguistics alongside the other five major levels of linguistic analysis, namely phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Pragmatics has been closely twinned with semantics to provide an efficient portrait of meaning in communication. In a sentence like (Are you happy now?) the conventional meaning could be simply referring to health. Nonetheless, it could be recognized by the hearer as a discomforting reaction over the addressee's misconduct. The inevitable involvement of pragmatics in accomplishing meaning interpretation has resulted in various interpretations of this relatively new concept. However, none has so far excluded pragmatics from the domain of linguistics. The main attempt was made by Chapman (2011) who postulates that it is more logical to exclude pragmatics from what is labelled 'core' linguistics as its main concern is not language itself, but the role of context in producing and interpreting language. This paper hypothesizes that pragmatics can be removed from the list of microlinguistic branches and relocated within the domain of macrolinguistics.

1.1. Approaches to the definition and categorization of pragmatics

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (1995) define pragmatics as 'The study of language use and its relation to language structure and context of utterance'. They (ibid: 343) refer to Charles Morris's definition of pragmatics (1938) as 'the relation of signs to their users.' Robins (1997) points out that the wide-ranging coverage of pragmatics is attributed to the original approaches of Malinowski, J. Firth, L. Austin and J. R. Searle. Aitchison (1999) states that pragmatics deals with the leftovers of semantics, i.e. those areas of meaning that cannot be captured by semantic theory, will be predicted pragmatically. She categorizes the study of meaning from two senses, viz. a narrow sense covering the study of meaning arrived at by the addresser and the addressee, and the broadest sense is about the general principles that people follow in their interaction. She further refers to pragmatics as 'the waste-paper basket of semantics'.

Falk (1978) points out that applying the rules of semantic interpretation for questions in English means trespassing the real world interpretation of certain structures. He maintains that a question in structure may tend to be a polite request (Can you take out the garbage?). Lyons (1981) corners the role of pragmatics to that of investigating utterance meaning contrasted with sentence meaning, which is semantics. Leech (1983) and Birner (2013) refer to the interaction and intersection of pragmatics with what the latter calls (linguistic subfields), focusing mainly on phonology, syntax and semantics. Birner's approach stems from her strong belief that pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics. Archer (2012) adds phonetics and lexicology to the list of contributing linguistic subfields for the construction of meaning. Radford et al. (2009) also refer to the contextual value of pragmatics and how it rereads sentences through their utterance value.

1.2. Relocating Pragmatics

The quick scan of definitions and identifications of pragmatics by some outstanding linguists corner pragmatics to the narrow domain of microlinguistics. Microlinguistics could be defined as a broad term covering the study of core levels of linguistic analysis, which are traditionally listed as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Macrolinguistics, however, is the broad term that covers interdisciplinary fields of linguistic analysis, such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, text linguistics, stylistics, computational linguistics, neurolinguistics, etc. All linguists might not unquestionably adapt this categorization. Phonetics, for example, has had a shaky position among the core levels of linguistic analysis due to its intensive and inevitable relationship and interdependence with human biology and physiology, deeper than its contact with its superficially connected sister, namely *phonology*. The relocation of phonetics has opened many areas of study for physicians, psychologists, sociologists, neurologists and even linguists to study speech diseases such as aphasia and dyslexia, and the speech disorders: stuttering, stammering and cluttering. Nevertheless, it paves the way for linguists to make use of phonetic facts in carrying out their studies on the production, transmission and perception of speech sounds.

The study of meaning has also eluded linguists and philosophers. It might be due to the complex nature of meaning itself or to the vagueness of contributors of meaning construction, for example

specifying the main source of meaning production between the speaker and the hearer. It is not so far settled, and might not be completely specified, whether meaning mainly resides with the addresser or the addressee. Additionally, factors such as culture and context heavily contribute to the establishment of meaning.

The research hypothesis does not delimit the role of pragmatics in assigning meaning to utterances. However, it liberates pragmatics from semantics' enslavement, to the researcher, mistakenly claimed by some linguists. Pragmatics as the study of language in relation to context, may cancel our semantic understanding of every sentence we produce at a certain context. Consider the following example.

- (1) Mother: Have you done your homework, honey?
 Daughter: You doubt it, mom?

The mother's direct question is responded to by the daughter's indirect follow up question (You doubt it, mom?). She may try to confirm that she has already done her homework, or simply prefer not to confirm because she might have not done her homework completely. There might be other interpretations as well. However, none of the expected interpretations of the daughter's answer could be arrived at based on semantic analysis. It is not logical to consider pragmatics as a dustbin for semantics when pragmatics can provide full interpretation to the conversation, whereas semantics fails to do so completely. This separation or divorce between semantics and pragmatics is positive for the latter as it consolidates the connection between pragmatics and psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis and phonology. Engagement of pragmatics with these fields in order to arrive at a logical interpretation of conversations and dialogues empowers pragmatics over semantics in recognizing communicative meaning. Hence, semantics could be retained as the linguistic study of dictionary and conventional meaning of lexicons and individual sentences, whereas pragmatics studies the total meaning of utterances constructed in actual connected speech.

This increase in the domain of pragmatics widens its scope to extend beyond the domain of core linguistic analysis. Thus, pragmatics could be a major contributor, along with the rest of concepts, in assigning meaning to utterances, but definitely within the area of macrolinguistic analysis.

1.3. Context

If we go through a list of levels of linguistic analysis (micro and macro) we can observe the position of pragmatics through its main unit of study.

#	Level of Linguistic Analysis	Micro OR Macro	Main Unit of Study
1	Phonetics	Microlinguistics	Phone
2	Phonology	Microlinguistics	Phoneme
3	Morphology	Microlinguistics	Morpheme
4	Syntax	Microlinguistics	Sentence
5	Semantics	Microlinguistics	Lexicon and Sentence
6	Pragmatics	?Microlinguistics	Context
7	Sociolinguistics	Macrolinguistics	Culture
8	Psycholinguistics	Macrolinguistics	Mind
9	Neurolinguistics	Macrolinguistics	Brain
10	Text Linguistics	Macrolinguistics	Text and Discourse
11	Stylistics	Macrolinguistics	Literary Texts
12	Anthropological Linguistics	Macrolinguistics	Unwritten Languages

A quick look is enough to observe that context, as the main tool or unit of studying pragmatics, goes more smoothly with culture, mind, brain, etc., and not with phoneme, morpheme and sentence. The microlinguistic areas of study are of more interest for studies within language proper, whereas macrolinguistics targets the interlinguistic fields, prominently including context. Context is not part of the intralinguistic components, but rather an active component of interlinguistics. The following example manifests how different context provide completely different readings of the same utterance.

- (2) Addressee: Are you satisfied with your scores?
Addressee: Are you kidding me?

The indirect response by the addressee could mean either YES or NO based on the context. If the conversation is not followed by follow-up questions, the essential factor that helps understanding the addressee's response is the context. This never falls within the non-dynamic areas of microlinguistics.

1.4. Pragmatic Concepts and Principles

This paper does not discuss the pragmatic principles individually. It rather lists them and focuses on the list in order to see if the pragmatic components go with microlinguistic or macrolinguistic analysis. The main pragmatic concepts and principles (Speech Act, Cooperative Principle and Maxims, Politeness Principle, Implicature, Inference, *Imference, Deixis and Presupposition) surround language. They help understanding the illocutionary force of an utterance, and do not constitute part of the concrete components of a sentence structure. Even the pragmatic principles could be used as evidence to relocate pragmatics, if not as a bare macrolinguistic level of analysis, at least as a connecting level that constructs a meaning bridge between the microlinguistic and macrolinguistic levels of analysis.

* This new term has been coined by the researcher in a paper published in September 2015, and it proposed the shelter term (imference) for both speaker's conversational implicature and addressee's generated inference whenever they are identical.

2. Conclusions

Throughout the analysis and elaborations, I have found out that pragmatics is not the waster paper basket for semantics, but rather an inevitable level of analysis. Pragmatics, though deals with meaning interpretation, might work in a direction that is distinct from that of semantics, i.e. semantics studies meaning within core intralinguistic fields, whereas pragmatics focuses on meaning construction interlinguistically. Hence, pragmatics could be relocated as a major field of macrolinguistic analysis, along with psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. This supports the contemporary interdisciplinary vision of connecting language studies to other fields of humanities and specific natural sciences.

References:

- Aitchison, J. (1999). *Linguistics*. London: Hodder Headline Plc.
- Akmajian, A., Demers, R.A., Farmer, A.K., & Harnish, R.M. (1995). *Linguistics: an introduction to language and communication (4th Edition)*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- Dawn, A., Aijmer, K., & Wichmann, A. (2012). *Pragmatics: an advanced resource book for students*. London: Routledge
- Birner, Betty J. (2013). *Introduction to Pragmatics*. United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell
- Chapman, S. (2011). *Pragmatics*. United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan
- Falk, J. S. (1978). *Linguistics and Language: a survey of basic concepts and implications (2nd Edition)*. New York, John Wiley and Sons.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lyons, J. (1981). *Language and Linguistics: an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Radford, A., Atkinson, M., Britain, D., Clahsen, H., & Spencer, A. (2009). *Linguistics: An Introduction (2nd Edition)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robins, R. H. (1997). *A Short History of Linguistics (4th Edition)*. London: Longman.
- Mahmood, R. (2015). A Pragmatic Analysis of Imference as a Collective Term for Implicature and Inference. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 3(9). Retrieved from; <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijsell/v3-i9/8.pdf>