

التداولية وبناء المعنى في التواصل باللغة الإنجليزية

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### Pragmatics and Meaning Construction in English Communication

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#### المُلخَص

إنَّ تقديم صورةٍ مكتملةٍ للمعنى في التواصل بالغةٍ إنجليزيةٍ يتعدَّر على البنية الدلالية وحدها، لأنَّ الشكل اللغوي نادرًا ما يحمل معنىً ثابتًا مستقلًا عن الاستعمال والوظيفة. فالمعنى يُبنى عبر عمليات تتجاوز المعنى المررَّم، ومن ثمَّ تصبح العمليات التداولية الخاصة بتكوين المعنى وتنظيمه عنصرًا محوريًا في هذه الدراسة، التي تنطلق من أطروحة مفادها أن المعنى يُنشأ ويترسخ في الممارسة التواصلية بوصفه شأنًا تداوليًا، لا مجرد نتيجة لاحقة للعملية الدلالية. تُستخلص عبر إطار تفسيري إضافي لتحديد المعنى من الرسائل المررَّمَة في التواصل الإنجليزي. وبدلًا من إخضاع المعنى لإطارٍ إضافي بعد التفسير الدلالي، تعتمد هذه الدراسة على نظريات قائمة مسبقًا، مثل نظرية أفعال الكلام، والتضمينات الحوارية، والافتراضات المسبقة، لتقديم إطار منهجي ينظر إلى المعنى بوصفه عملية استدلالية في التواصل بالغةٍ إنجليزيةٍ. تعتمد هذه الورقة منهجًا حججياً-تحليليًا لإعادة تقييم النظريات التداولية الكلاسيكية وتعميمها نحو مفهوم حججى لبناء المعنى بوصفه عملية تفاعلية متمركزة حول التفاعل داخل التواصل. ووفقًا لهذا

المنظور، يُعاد تصور التواصل على أنه نقل لإشارات سياقية تُفَعَّل الاستدلال الاستنتاجي لدى المتلقين، بما يتيح لهم الاضطلاع بدورِ فاعل في عملية خلق المعنى عبر الفعل التواصلية ذاته. ويكشف الخطاب الطبيعي في اللغة الإنجليزية عن مواطن الضعف الكامنة في نماذج التواصل الحرفي، الأمر الذي يدعم النظر إلى بناء المعنى بوصفه عملية تفاعلية، لا مجرد تصحيح دلالي ضمن سياق تشكّل المعنى كما تفترضه النظريات التداولية المعروضة في هذه الدراسة. وعلاوة على ذلك، تُسهم الورقة إسهامًا مهمًا في الإطار الأوسع لعلم التداولية في اللغة الإنجليزية، إذ تُقدّم النظريات التداولية بوصفها إطارًا تفسيريًا لفهم عملية التواصل في الإنجليزية.

### Abstract

A complete picture of meaning in English communication eludes semantic structure because linguistic form rarely carries any fixed meaning independent from use and function. Meaning is made in processes that span encoded meaning, and thus pragmatic processes of meaning constitution and regulation become an important consideration for this study by advancing the thesis that meaning is constructed and consolidated in communicative practice as an affair of pragmatics rather than an afterthought to semantic process when applying an additional interpretative framework to determine meaning from encoded messages in English communication. Rather than subsuming meaning to an additional framework after semantic interpretation, this study will employ pre-existing theories such as speech act theory, conversational implicatures, and presuppositions to provide a systematic framework for meaning as an inferential process for English communication. This paper adopts an argumentative-analytic approach to reassess the classical pragmatic theories and to generalize the theories towards an argumentative concept for an interaction-centered construction of meaning through communication. Instead, communication comes to be viewed as the communication of context cues that activate the inferential reasoning in the communicative recipients, thus making it feasible for them to take an active role within the process of creating meaning through the communication process itself. Natural discourse in English bears the weaknesses incorporated within the literal communication models, thus validating the construction process of meaning as an interactive process rather than a semantic correction process within the context of meaning construction as per the pragmatic theories postulated in the paper. Further, the paper makes significant contributions within the broader context of pragmatics within English as the pragmatic theories



are advocated to act as an explanation framework within the context of understanding the communication process within English.

### Introduction

The question of meaning has occupied prime importance in linguistics for quite a number of decades, with debated streams of thought running between theories that place meaning in linguistic structure versus those that place it in language use. Classical semantic theories, especially truth-conditional logico-semantic theories, have generally approached meaning as if it were something intrinsic to linguistic structures and accessible to those with linguistic competence. While these theories adequately explain compositionality and reference, they fall short when it comes to justifying how speakers typically communicate meanings that go beyond or depart from literal meanings. In natural English-speaking communication, messages are typically never interpreted independently but within complex contexts of intention, joint knowledge, and interaction, respectively. This work proposes that in English communication, meaning is not just pragmatically enriched after semantic interpretation but pragmatically constructed to start with.

Argues against hierarchical approaches to meaning where meaning is attributed to semantics and categorized as secondary to pragmatics. According to Levinson, despite numerous efforts to regard meaning as having distinct semantic and pragmatic components, there always exists an instability with regard to demarcating the two domains because pragmatic inference is pervasive from all levels (Levinson 28). In this regard, this study proposes to argue the case for pragmatic inference as the major framework for meaning in English.

The limitations of strictly semantic studies are best seen in connection with instances of contextual indeterminacy. “You might want to check” can be a recommendation, a warning, a criticism, or a command, and these do not involve semantically specified uses. The reason for this is not a matter of semantic ambiguity but one of pragmatic inference. In connection with this, it can be observed that “pragmatics is a matter of analyzing the process of interpretation by hearers of a speaker’s meaning” (Yule 4). Such a process is essentially integral to effective communication and is not a marginal phenomenon. Therefore, meaning is generated through cooperative interpretation, not through linguistic transmission.

This idea continues the philosophical tradition of Austin’s critique of the fallacy of description, which challenged the idea that language is essentially a matter of describing states of affairs. Austin’s claim that saying a sentence is an action (Austin 6), therefore, marked an important



shift towards an understanding of language that is more performative. Actions like promising, apologizing, or threatening have their import not only because of their semantic content but because of force and recognition as well. Hence, processes of meaning-making need to be understood in terms of action, convention, and recognition.

Another area of study of implicature, which clearly indicates the under-determination of meaning by linguistic form, involves the use of indirectness to convey a particular meaning not as a function of the failure of communicative success, but because of the role and function of the communicatively used expression of politeness, etc. As observed by Brown and Levinson, the use of the former strategy helps the speakers take account of the social aspect of harmony/social regard (Brown and Levinson 60).

Presupposition is another phenomenon that shows the dependence on assumptions for the creation of meaning. Presupposition is described as the set of propositions taken for granted in a conversation between the two parties (Levinson 168), and it is present regardless of the affirmation or negation. Instead, context serves not only as background but also actively contributes in the process of meaning creation. According to Verschueren, meaning is not something that is added as an additional variable in the form of context; on the contrary, meaning is achieved through integral components, one of those components being meaning itself (Verschueren 75).

Additionally, interaction contradicts linear views of communication. This is mainly because meaning is not constructed by communicative utterances from one person and received by another. This is because joint construction of meaning, when necessary, takes place through interaction. Clark discusses joint action, involving coordination, to convey language use (Clark 3). In English communication, for instance, meaning can be constructed through interaction.

This study moves forward an integrated approach in which pragmatic processes are seen as constitutive of meaning, filling a gap in the more traditional approach found in pragmatics, in which semantics and classification are sometimes privileged at the expense of construction. Rather than seeing speech acts, implication, presumption, and context as distinct entities, an integrated approach would see all of these phenomena as interconnected processes that work together toward communicative success. This approach also has important applications in linguistic theory and applied areas in which communicative competence requires skill in both grammar and pragmatics.





### Moving from Semantic Meaning to Pragmatic Construction

Semantic theory traditionally aimed to determine a fixed relation between expressions of language and the world, and such a relation is established through reference, truth conditions, or composition. While these frameworks are informative of the structure of syntax and logical relation, these frameworks are inadequate when it comes to explaining meaning as it is expressed in usage. Meaning that is not tied to usage is inadequate.

“Truth-conditional semantics holds that the interpretation of a statement consists in finding the conditions under which a statement is true or false.” Yet “knowing the truth-conditions of a statement will not allow us to conclude what the speaker intended by the statement” (Levinson 17). This applies to cases where the statement can still be true yet pragmatically misleading or ironic. In natural English conversation, speakers perform acts and accomplish interpersonal and interactional goals beyond the boundaries of propositional content.

This critique recognizes the importance of semantics while simultaneously emphasizing its incompleteness. It is the semantic content that supplies a system of potential meanings, whereas pragmatics places such meanings into context through inference. Yule marks this transition with the difference between sentence meaning and speaker meaning (Yule 5). This transition marks a paradigm shift in the definition of meaning from its representational roots to its process-oriented focus.

Under-determinacy adds further support to the need for pragmatic construction. This is the case because expressions of language conventionally lack encoded information that is adequate for the specification of the content of an utterance in context. According to Recanati, the meaning of language is rarely sufficient in specifying the content of an utterance (Recanati 3).

"I," "here," and "now" are examples of indexicals, which demonstrate the importance of context to content. Kaplan shows that context is essential in determining content (Kaplan 489). However, indexical is only one aspect of context. Context also involves temporality, speech attitudes, and scopes.

Indirectness raises further difficulties at the level of semantic theory. The kind of questions used as requests is one kind of mismatch between grammatical form and function. Thus, as Searle argues (35), meaning is based not on semantics but on knowledge and rational inferences. Indirectness is also involved in social motivations, as in politeness theory, and this highlights the importance of pragmatics in supplementing semantics in explaining how much is often conveyed beyond the verbal.

Semantic views face problems in handling ambiguity. While semantic views are able to pick out ambiguity, they are unable to account for how conversation partners arrive at a common intended meaning. Clark points out that "context allows conversation partners to reject implausible utterance interpretations," (Clark 68) a process pragmatics is able to account for.

A model of action is required in passing from semantic meaning towards pragmatic construction. Austin's distinction between constatives and performatives empirically contests truth-semantic approaches by judging their quality in respect to felicity and not truth (Austin 14). Of course, this is most apparent in contexts of institutional speech, where statements construct social or legal fact through pragmatic linkage of form and institution.

Pragmatic construction approaches semantics with a different set of principles that do not seek to eliminate semantics. Semantic information is used as a resource for guiding inference rather than as a determinant, providing a clue for the process of inference. The observation made by Levinson about pragmatics overreaching semantics indicates a relationship between pragmatics and semantics (Levinson 54). The process of meaning construction in English communication is, therefore, carried out through pragmatic processes.

### **The Pragmatic Theory of Action and Speech Acts**

The adoption of pragmatics as an action theory is a paradigm shift in linguistics as a theoretical subject. According to speech-act theory, based on Austin's views and further developed by Searle, saying something is viewed through its success rather than truth conditions. Austin's concept of "descriptive fallacy" gives a new meaning to 'language as doing,' summed up in his comment, "The saying of something is an act" (94).

Austin's threefold classification: Locutionary act: The act of producing meaningful expressions. The act of using these expressions with illocutionary force: The act of producing effects by using these expressions. The key point here is that the illocutionary force cannot be determined by the grammatical form of the sentence, as the same sentence may be used to achieve different kinds of act given the hermeneutic context in which it plays its role (Austin 99).

This is a reminder that the role of pragmatics is paramount in meaning creation. The same statement can be a warning, a promise, or an excuse, depending on pragmatics, and such a difference cannot be codified.

Searle further grounded the concept of speech acts based on social conventions by emphasizing the roles of constitutive rules and intentionality. "Illocutionary acts always imply the intention to bring





about changes by the acknowledgement of the very intention itself," hence the creation of meaning is the effect of intention-attribution (Searle 45). Finally, the classification of speech acts by Searle makes understandable the deep connection between language and social activity, particularly within institutional contexts where declarative acts generate change in the social world itself (Searle 51).

However, criticisms of speech act theory question the primacy of intention. On the other hand, the importance of shared meaning in interactions is emphasized by some models. According to Clark, language use is jointly done, and collaboration is necessary (Clark 9). Imposition of meaning is not possible; rather, meaning is derived from collaboration.

### **Inferential Meaning and Conversational Implicature**

The focus on conversational implicature illustrates the interpretation involved in the use of English. Grice's Cooperative Principle explains that successful communication requires that all participants recognize that each utterance is a contribution to achieving the shared purpose of the communication encounter (Grice 26). In cases where there is a perceived breach of one of the four maxims of conversation, namely those of Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner, implicature occurs because of the interpretation required in attempts to make sense of an otherwise problematic message that can restore meaningfulness to the interaction (Grice 28-31). Thus, there is compensation for breach of maxims via interpretation in implicature.

The utterance "She is very punctual" might carry an implication of criticism rather than praise, depending upon the context. The implication is worked out by the use of pragmatic inference rather than semantic values. According to Levinson, the phenomenon of implication relies heavily upon the expectations speakers have concerning what they would like to communicate in a context involving cooperative assumptions (Levinson 114).

Additionally, implicatures are seen to differ from semantic entailments in the area of cancellability. Due to the fact that the former can be canceled, it indicates that implicatures lie in the realm of pragmatics (Grice 31). On the other hand, the role of implicatures cannot be underestimated in the way it helps to uphold politeness and social balance. In this regard, it has been observed to facilitate face-redistributive acts such as refusals, criticism, and requests through the mechanism of indirectness developed by implicatures (Brown & Levinson 132).

### **Presupposition, Common Ground, and Cognitive Economy**

The presupposition further illustrates how meaning cannot be encoded linguistically. The presupposition is a kind of background information the

speakers take to be true, which usually holds even when the statement is negated (Levinson 168). In the sentence: John realized the meeting was canceled, the existence of the meeting would be presupposed regardless of whether it was affirmed or denied. The presupposition does not depend on propositional content because it always holds true even when negated. Presuppositions help in cognitive economy because they allow speakers and listeners to communicate efficiently without being too explicit. Clark observes that communication involves using shared assumptions that help eliminate redundancy and facilitate coherence (Clark 92). Therefore, the process of presupposition plays a pragmatic role in structuring communication around shared information.

Connected to the idea of presupposition is the idea of common ground. This is explained by Stalnaker as the set of propositions that are mutually accepted by participants for communicative purposes (Stalnaker 83). Creating meaning is contingent on speakers' abilities to assess and manage common ground. Speakers manage common ground by making their listeners accommodate content not already in common ground by adjusting their assumptions. Accommodation is explained by Lewis as an activity by which listeners accept content when it is presupposed in order to maintain interpretation continuity (Lewis 340).

Presupposition also has implications regarding relations and ideology. Fairclough highlights the idea that presupposed information may well position the participants in a certain way without having to state it (Fairclough 121). This example highlights how presupposition affects the alignment between speaker and hearer and enhances the effectiveness of communication.

### **Context as a Meaning-Generating System**

Context should not be viewed as something that provides the basis for interpretation to take place; on the contrary, context actively participates in the process of assigning meanings to something. Instead of being brought into the process post-interpretation, context becomes an essential element of the process itself whereby meanings are assigned. Kaplan illustrates how the indexical here and the indexical you depend entirely on the context for their reference (Kaplan 490).

From the perspective of relevance theory, Sperber and Wilson describe context as the set of assumptions that are used to guide interpretation towards relevance. This is because, for Sperber and Wilson, "meanings are not properties of forms, but properties of combinations of forms and assumptions" (Sperber and Wilson 15).

Contextual parameters play an essential role in resolving an ambiguity and maintaining consistency. It is empirically demonstrated by Altmann





about the influence of context on interpreting desired semantics (Altmann 76). In the process of communication, the developing contexts influence the meaning with each uptake in a conversation, which is reinforced in their respective meanings (Gumperz 229; Clark 3). This clarifies the role of pragmatics in an adaptive system of semantic formation in communication with the English language.

### **Interaction, Negotiation, and the Co-Construction of Meaning**

Meaning needs to be understood as a process of joint construction, rather than as a product of human intention. Bakhtin's point that "the word is a two-sided act" highlights the fact that meaning involves both the speaker and the listener (Bakhtin 293). According to conversation analysis, the process of understanding is managed by processes like turn-taking, repair, and alignment (Sacks 222; Schegloff 207). These processes allow participants to track the level of understanding and modify their turn accordingly. Lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic alignment helps to promote understanding and reduces the process of interpretation (Pickering and Garrod 169).

Interaction provides the context in which the pragmatic processes of implicatures and presupposition are triggered and stabilized. The processes of clarification requests, reformulations, and feedback sequences also mediate the coordination of interpretations within communication (Clark & Brennan, 127; Brown & Levinson, 214). Therefore, the meaning within English communication is thus achieved through interactive cognitive processes.

### **Pragmatic Meaning and English Discourse Practices**

Pragmatic meaning is a structured practice of discourse in which the inference of meaning is practiced instead of direct articulation. Discourse is a pragmatic activity that is governed by social conventions. Fairclough defines discourse as a practice through which socially constructed modes of meaning are organized (Fairclough 64). Thus, the process of meaning-making is based on socially organized patterns of language instead of isolated instances.

Spoken discourse tends to carry meaning via implication, ellipsis, and context, which helps to communicate information effectively. According to Schiffrin, discourse markers tend to organize conversation with respect to function rather than meaning in discourse (Schiffrin 49). Likewise, the meaning of discourse in writing happens via framing, presumption, and selection. All the above points tend to verify the existence of pragmatics independently for the different modes of discourse.

### **Towards an Integrated Model of Meaning Construction**

This research supports an unitary approach that sees meaning as the result of the combination of inference, context, presupposition, and interaction. This is because Levinson asserts that the pragmatic process of meaning construction is not linear, and there is an overlap in the process (Levinson 27).

Inference provides options for interpretation, context provides relevant assumptions, and interaction guarantees consistency. Inference, context, and interaction are all working in combination. This view of pragmatics considers it a theory of meaning instead of interpretation in semantics.

### **Implications For Linguistic Theory and Applied Studies**

An approach to meaning as a construct of pragmatics conflicts with theories of language where meaning is identified at a sentence level of linguistic structuring. The integral significance of language as a matter of practice becomes crucial in clarifying a problem of meaning, in contrast to more formalized language structures (Clark 4).

In applied settings like language learning, translation, and cross-cultural communication, it is important that the notion emphasizes the need for pragmatic competence. In order to communicate proficiently, one needs to do more than construct grammatically correct sentences or phrases by inferring and negotiating meanings.

### **Conclusion**

English communication realizes meaning, not through linguistic form, but through a pragmatically mediated process of inference, deduction, presupposition, and interaction. The pragmatically mediated process shows that meaning is constructed through cognitive and social activity rather than through semantic decoding. The construction-based theory of meaning functions as a comprehensive framework for a dynamic, interactionally, and contextually defined process of communication. This is because a construction-based theory of meaning supports, rather than rejects, pragmatic theory, focusing on pragmatically mediated communication processes in English.

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