2.1 An Overview of Pragmatics

Pragmatics can be usefully defined as the study of how utterances have meanings in situations. Pragmatics concentrates on those aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and takes into account knowledge about the physical and social world. Pragmatics is about the interaction of semantic knowledge with our knowledge of the world, taking into account contexts of use, (Griffiths, 2006:1). Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader) (Yule, 1996:3). Yule categorized pragmatics into four areas namely:

1. Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning

   It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves.

2. Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning.

   This type of study necessarily involves the interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and how the context influences what is said. It requires a consideration of how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they are talking to, where, when, and under what circumstances. Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning.

3. Pragmatics is the study of how gets communicated than is said.
This approach also necessarily explores how listeners can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at an interpretation of the speaker’s intended meaning. This type of study explores how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated. We might say that it is the investigation of invisible meaning.

4. Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance.

This perspective than raises the question of what determines the choice between the said and the unsaid. The basic answer is tried to the notion of distance. Closeness, whether it is physical, social, or conceptual, implies shared experience. On the assumption of how close or distant the listener is, speakers determine how much needs to be said.

Here is one example of pragmatics:

The Queen and her butler, James, are in the drawing room. The window is open.

9. Queen says: it’s cold in here.

It may means:

(a) The temperature in this place is frigid.

(b) The Queen asks James to shut the window.

As we can see, two or more utterances might have the same underlying sentence as their ‘script’, but they can have quite different interpretations in context. By now we will have noticed that interpreting what a speaker’s utterance means involves a fair amount of intelligent guesswork for the hearer, and considerably more knowledge than comes from simply knowing the meanings of individual words and
how they combine to form sentences. In the following units, we will be looking in more detail at what this sort of intelligent guesswork might involve.

Pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended. As critical as this ability is for communication success, it is often not given the emphasis it deserves in the teaching of a second language; with the result that second-language speakers, who lack pragmatic competence, may produce grammatically flawless speech that nonetheless fails to achieve its communicative aims (Fraser, 2010:15).

The process whereby pragmatic constrain become conventionalized in the pragmatically specialized features of grammar provides an explanation of how, over a long time-scale, grammar itself becomes adapted to pragmatic constrains. Another example namely:

10. Are you able to repair this watch?

Although it will be pragmatically interpreted in the right context as carting the force of a request (“I want to know if you can mend this watch, and if so, I want to do so”), this sentence is not grammatically specialized for that purpose.
2.2 Maxim of Cooperation

In much of the preceding discussion, it is assumed that speakers and listeners involved in conversation are generally cooperating with each other. This sense of cooperation is simply one in which people having a conversation are not normally assumed to be trying to refuse, trick, or withhold relevant information from each other. In most circumstances, this kinds of cooperation is only the starting point for making sense of what it said.

Yule (1996:36) explain the concept of there being an expected amount of information provided in conversation is just one aspect of the more general idea that people involved in a conversation will cooperate with each other. In most circumstances, the assumption of cooperation is so pervasive that it can be stated as a cooperative principle of conversation and elaborated in four sub-principles, called maxim. As shown in following paragraph.

The cooperative principles: Make conversational contribution such as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which speakers are engaged.

The maxims:

1. Quantity
   - Make contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of exchange).
   - Do not make contribution more informative as is required.

2. Quality
Try to make contribution one that is true.
• Do not say something that is believed to be false.

• Do not say something that is lacked adequate evidence.

3. Relation

Be relevant.

4. Manner

Be perspicuous.

• Avoid obscurity of expression.

• Avoid ambiguity.

• Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).

• Be orderly.

These maxims is unstated assumptions we have in conversation. It is assumed that people are normally going to provide an appropriate amount of information. Because these principles are assumed in normal interaction, speakers rarely mention them. However, there are certain kinds of expressions speaker use to mark that they may be in danger of not fully adhering to the principles. These kinds of expression called hedges (Yule, 1996:38).
2.3 Hedges

The concept of hedge in linguistics was coined by Lakoff (1972:195). The terms hedge and hedging, in their literal sense, refer to the idea of ‘barrier’, ‘limit’, ‘defence’, or to the means used to protect or defend the speaker. One area in which the lack of pragmatic competence can create serious problems for a second language speaker is that of hedging, a rhetorical strategy that attenuates either the full semantic value of a particular expression, as in He’s sort of nice, or the full force of a speech act, as in:

11. I must ask you to stop doing that.

When non-native speakers fail to hedge appropriately, they may be perceived as impolite, offensive, arrogant, or simply inappropriate. Failing to recognize a hedged utterance, they may misunderstand a native speaker’s meaning. This is especially unfortunate when speakers are otherwise fluent, since people typically expect that someone who speaks their language well on the grammatical level has also mastered the pragmatic niceties.

Lakoff suggested that any attempt to limit truth conditions for natural language sentences to true, false, and “nonsense” would distort the natural language concepts by portraying them as having sharp rather than vaguely defined boundaries. Suggesting that this is an area that deserves study, he wrote that “For me, some of the most interesting questions are raised by the study of words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness – words whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy” (Lakoff, 1972: 195).
He was interested in the properties of words such as rather or sort of and how they make things fuzzy or less fuzzy (vague or less vague). For Lakoff, hedging involved the attenuation of the membership of a particular expression, for example:

12. John is sort of smart.
13. That is technically a bookcase.

or the reinforcement of the class membership, for example:

14. John is very, very smart.
15. I really love you.
16. What I tell you is the absolute truth.

Lakoff began with a semantic discussion of sort of, pointing out that this predicate modifier and others like it reveal different distinctions of category membership. In the sentences below,

17. A robin is sort of a bird. (false, no questions it’s a bird)
18. A chicken is sort of a bird. (true, or very close to true)
19. A penguin is sort of a bird. (true, or close to true)
20. A bat is sort of a bird. (false, or very close to false)
21. A cow is sort of a bird. (false)

The degree of truth must be “rejected” for a real bird, “possibly” accepted for a non-prototypical bird like a chicken or penguin, but “rejected” again when the animal of which bird was being predicated was simply not a bird or not much of a bird. Lakoff discussed other hedges such as par excellence, typically, strictly speaking, loosely speaking, and in essence, showing that these hedges interact with
the term they modify, but in different ways. All his examples involved predicate adjectives or predicate nominals, and all were declarative sentences. It is relevant that Lakoff was primarily interested in hedges, not hedging. He offered the following as examples of hedges in English namely: real, regular, actually, almost, as it were, basically, can be view as, crypto-, especially, essentially, exceptionally, for the most part, in a manner of speaking, in a real sense, in a sense, in a way, kind of, largely, literally, loosely speaking, more or less, mostly, often, on the tall side, par excellence, particularly, pretty much, principally, pseudo-, quintessentially, rather, really, relatively, roughly, so to say, somewhat, sort of, strictly speaking, technically, typically, very, virtually (Lakoff, 1972: 196).

Hubler (1983) made a similar two-way distinction of hedging, between what he called understatement and hedges, although he uses understatement as a cover term for both. Understatement means that “the emotional negatebility (of sentences) is restricted through the indetermination of the phrastic,” that is, they concern the propositional content of the sentence. It is a bit cold in here, contains an understatement. Hedging “is restricted through the indetermination of the neustic,” that is, it concerns the speaker’s attitude to the hearer regarding the proposition, the claim to validity of the proposition the speaker makes.

22. It is cold in Alaska, I suppose,
The sentence above contains a hedge.

The fact that an expression may be used as a hedge is not part of its definition. In fact, an expression is usually only recognized as a hedge when it is used in hedging. Thus, it should not be surprising that there is no grammatical class of hedges, since hedging devices are drawn from
every syntactic category. At best we might say that hedges form an open functional class. As Clemen (1997: 6) comments:

“There is no limit to the linguistic expressions that can be considered as hedges . . . The difficulty with these functional definitions is that almost any linguistic item or expression can be interpreted as a hedge . . . no linguistic items are inherently hedges but can acquire this quality depending on the communicative context or the co-text. This also means that no clear-cut lists of hedging expressions are possible.”

2.3.1 Types of Hedges

Fraser (2010:204) offers below some examples of types of English hedges and their associated linguistic analysis, drawn from a variety of sources namely:

a) Impersonal pronouns (one, and it)

An impersonal pronoun is used when a person does not want to indicate a specific noun.

23. One just doesn’t do that.

b) Concessive conjunctions (although, though, while, whereas, even though, even if, ...)

A concessive clause is a clause which begins with "although" or "even though" and which expresses an idea that suggests the opposite of the main part of the sentence.

24. Even though you dislike the beach, it’s worth going for the view.

c) Hedged performative (use of moal to hedge performative verb)
Hedged performative is an indirect illocution whose illocutionary force is expressed directly by a performative verb but is given an additional illocutionary force by some device, such as modalization or subordination.

25. I must ask you to sit down.

d) Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect speech, also called reported speech or indirect discourse, is a means of expressing the content of statements, questions or other utterances, without quoting them explicitly as is done in direct speech


e) Introductory phrases (I believe, to our knowledge, it is our view that, we feel that)

A good way to break up a group of sentences that all have the same subject-verb-object format is to use an introductory phrase, which makes the reading a bit more interesting and engaging.

27. I believe that he is here.

f) Modal adverbs (perhaps, possibly, probably, practically, presumably, apparently)

Modal adverbs is an adverb that expresses likelihood.

28. I can possibly do that

g) Modal adjectives (possible, probable, un/likely...)

Modal adjective is an adjective that expresses likelihood.
29. *It is possible* that there is no water in the well.

h) Modal noun (*assumption, claim, possibility, estimate, suggestion...*)

Modal noun is a noun that expresses likelihood.

30. The *assumption* is that you are going to go.

i) Modal verbs (*might, can, would, could...*)

One of these verb forms: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, ought to, used to, need, had better. They are all used with other verbs to express ideas such as possibility, permission, or intention.

31. John *might* leave now.

j) Epistemic verbs (*seem, appear, believe, assume, suggest, think...*)

The epistemic verbs are a class on their own as they do not show action such as kick, wash, eat, etc. In the use of these verbs, a continuation is obligatory in the form of a ‘that’-clausal structure or in the instance of ‘appear’, the use of the infinitive is obligatory if the subject is not of the cleft structure.

32. *It seems* that no one wants to go.

k) Negation

Negative questions are used when the person who asks expects a positive answer, no matter what else might be implied. There is no question of frequency of use; when the speaker wants to express an amount of certainty for the answer, a negative question will be used.

33. *Didn’t* Harry leave? (I think Harry left)
34. *I don’t think* Im going. vs. *Im not* going. (Former hedges the meaning of Latter)

l) Reversal tag

35. He’s coming, *isn’t he?*

m) Parenthetic construction

Speakers will often use parenthetical phrases when they discuss a topic, these phrases are digressions which add some new thought or insight to the topic. They can be as simple as something like this and used often in conversation:

*I saw Mrs. Pulaski at the grocery store yesterday. She (just to note) will have her shop open on Christmas Eve.*

A parenthetical clause is similar in that it, too, is a digression. However, its grammatical construction involves a subject and a predicate, but does not always constitute a complete sentence. For example, a speaker could say something like this:

*I saw Mrs. Pulaski (who, by the way, looks entirely different now) at the grocery store today.*

36. The picnic is here, *I guess.*

n) If clause

If clauses are also known as conditional clauses or conditional sentences. This means that the event in the main clause (not counting the *if*) only takes place if the condition in the clause containing *if* is fulfilled.
37. *If true*, we’re in deep trouble.

o) Agentless Passive

Remember that all passive sentences are derived from active sentences. The so called agentless passive a sentence without a "by-phrase" is interesting because it is derived from an active sentence without an explicit subject, a sentence that isn't possible in English.

38. Many of the troops were injured.

p) Conditional subordinators (as long as, so long as, assuming that, given that...)

Subordinating conjunctions are words or phrases that introduce dependent clauses in a sentence. Conditional clauses are dependent clauses used to describe the conditions under which something may or may not happen.

39. Unless the strike has been called off, there will be no trains tomorrow.

q) Progressive form

English progressive verb tenses describe ongoing actions in the present, past or future. What’s the difference between each pair of simple tense forms? Not a whole lot unless you are a grammarian. People often interchange present and progressive forms without creating any problems. But shades of difference in meaning do exist.

40. I am hoping you will come.
r) Tentative Inference

41. The mountains should be visible from here.

s) Conditional clause implying permission (if you don’t mind my saying so, if I may say so)

Conditional clause ia a type of adverbial clause that states a hypothesis or condition, real or imagined. A conditional clause may be introduced by the subordinating conjunction if or another conjunction, such as unless, provided that, or in case of. Like other adverbial clauses, a conditional clause can come either before or after the clause on which it states a condition.

42. If you don’t mind me saying so, your slip is showing.

t) Conditional clause as a metalinguistic comment (if that’s the right word...)

43. His style is florid, if that’s the right word.

u) Conditional clause expressing uncertainty about the extralinguistic knowledge required for a correct interpretation of the utterance (if I’m correct, in case you don’t remember)

44. Chomsky views cannot be reconciled with Piaget, if I understand him correctly.

v) Metalinguistic comment such as (strictly speaking, so to say, exactly, almost, just about, if you will)
Metalinguistics is the branch of linguistics that studies language and its relationship to other cultural behaviors. It is the study of dialogue relationships between units of speech communication as manifestations and enactments of co-existence.

45. He has an idea, a hypothesis, if you will, that you may find interesting.

2.3.2 Function of Hedges

Coates (1996: 154-162) introduces four functions of hedges namely:

a. The first function of hedges introduced by Coates (1996) is the expression of doubt and less (more) confidence. People use hedges to express doubt. The people as a speaker lack of commitment to what they are saying. They lack of confidence in truth of the proposition expressed in the utterance. I think, maybe, may, might, you know and probably are important hedges to express doubt and uncertainty (Coates, 1996: 154-156).

For example:

Helen says, “What it means about next week is we may not have enough for two groups, cause I had two apologies in advance,”

The auxiliary may here signals Helen’s lack of commitment to the proposition expressed in the utterance.

b. The second function of hedges would be sensitive to others feeling. The speaker takes account of the feelings of the addressee. They communicate proposition, attitude to propositions and also attitude to addressee which is called interpersonal function. Sort of, kind of, really, could, possibly, perhaps and might are the examples of hedges to show sensitivity (Coates, 1996: 156-
The speaker doesn’t want to offend the addressee. Hedges protect the speaker from the full force of controversial claim. It protects the speaker as well as the addressee. Hedges fulfill the need to have personal space to be respected and the need to be acknowledged and liked.

For example:
“She looks very sort of um – kind of matronly really”.

The speaker doesn’t want to offend the addressee. The speaker protects the addressee from the full force of the controversial claim by using hedges.

c. The third important function of hedges is searching for the right word (Coates, 1996 : 158-159). Hedges are also useful to give signal that speaker is searching for a word (precise word). It means that the speaker having trouble in finding the right words to say what they mean. Sort of, kind of, you know, well and really are the common examples of hedges to show that the speaker is searching for the right word. Hedges signal the word may not be the perfect choice and pause is commonly occurred.

For example:
He (orang outang) had you know – he had five adequate manip – whatever you call hands things.

The speaker seriously engage the experience in struggle for accurate-self-expression. In other words, the speaker is trying to find the right word to explain about orang outang (Coates, 1996).

d. The last function of hedges which proposed there, is to avoid the appearance of playing the expert (Coates, 1996: 152-162). Hedges are used to minimize
social distance (expert and non-expert). It avoids the role of expert in conversation. Hedges dilute, the force of what the speaker is saying. It makes the speaker appear less fluent. The speaker avoid opening up distance between participants, think, well, whatever, thing, sort of, and you know are examples of hedges to signal that the speaker is avoiding playing expert. The speaker avoids sounding like an expert. Hedges make the proposition sound less authoritative. It provide preservation of equal status and maintenance of social closeness. For example:

“I think I’m always opposed to that group”

The speaker avoid to say as if an expert, the speaker need to emerge a sentence to make his/her utterance sound less authoritative. Speaker avoids to be an expert.