# Pragmatic Analysis of a Text : Problems and Prospects

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**Abstract.** The meaning of a word is decided by the sentence in which it is used and the meaning of a sentence becomes clear when it is used in a particular context. A textual meaning also varies from different perspectives and a text cannot mean fully if some of its aspects are not analysed carefully. An interpreter, therefore, should take so many things like, context, reference, inference, presupposition, and implicatures to decipher the hidden meaning from a text. The present paper will dive into different pragmatic points of view to rediscover the real meaning of a text.
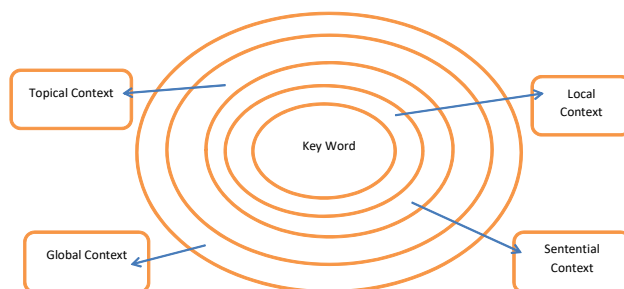
**Keywords :** Context; reference; inference; linguistic environment.

A word usually doesn't imply any meaning, but it does when it is used in a sentence. Similarly a sentence does not exert any meaning until it is used in a particular situation or context. A sentence may seem unusual when it is used interpreted out of context. A word or sentence connotes quite a different meaning from its isolated one when they are used in a text. A textual meaning also varies from different perspectives and a text cannot mean fully if some of its aspects are not analysed carefully. The meanings of some of the deictic forms such as here, now, I, you, this, and that cannot be determined unless the interpreters possess the knowledge of speakers, hearers, time, and place. An interpreter, therefore, should take so many things like, context, reference, inference, presupposition, and implicatures to decipher the hidden meaning from a text. So this article will dive into different pragmatic points of view to rediscover the real meaning of a text.

**Context:** According to Hornby, "Words that come before and after a word, phrase, statement, etc., help to show what its meaning is." (250) According to Dash, Niladri Sekhar, "The term context refers to an immediate linguistic environment (rarely detached or isolated) in which a particular word occurs."(22) Thus a context is called the immediate smaller or greater linguistic unit that assists the reader to decipher a particular meaning of a particular word that occurs in that unit.

**Classification of Context:** Miller and Leacock (2000) have classified context into two types: (a) local context, (b) topical context. While according to Dash, Niladri Sekhar (2001:22) context is of four types: (a) local context,(b) sentential context,(c)topical context, and (d) global context. Local context relates to the one or two words that occur immediately before and after the keyword. Similarly the topical context refers to the topic of the text where keyword has been used to determine its meaning.

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In the same way sentential context refers to the next circle immediately beyond the local context while the global context indicates the world at large.



**Context of situations:** Since the beginning of the 1970s, linguists have become increasingly aware of the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences and texts. The implications of taking context into account are well expressed by Sadock :

> There is, then, a serious methodological problem that confronts the advocate of linguistic pragmatics. Given some aspects of what a sentence conveys in a particular context, is that aspect part of what the sentence conveys in virtue of its meaning…or should it be 'worked out' on the basis of Gricean principles from the rest of the meaning of the sentences and relevant facts of the context of utterance? (281)

So understanding the context of situation is vehemently important to extract the real meaning of a sentence or a text.

**Features of Context**: Brown and Yule (36) set two examples of two scenarios in which an identical utterance is produced by two distinct speakers that give complete opposite meanings.

(a)      Speaker: a young mother , hearer: her mother -in-law, place: park, by a duck-pond, time: sunny afternoon in September 1962. They are watching the young mother's two-year-old son chasing ducks and the mother-in-law has just remarked that her son, the child's father, was rather backward at this age. The young mother says:

<div align="center">I do think Adam's quick</div>

(b)       Speaker: a student, hearer: a set of students, place: sitting round a coffee table in the refectory, time: evening in March 1980. John, one of the group, has just told a joke. Everyone laughs except Adam. Then Adam laughs.

<div style="text-align:center">I do think Adam's quick.</div>

In the examples cited above, the speakers say of Adam that he is quick. But the word 'quick' in the first context obviously means *faster* or *quicker* but later it means the opposite though the referents of *I* and *Adam* are fixed by the spatio-temporal co-ordinates.

Firth proposed an approach to the principled description of such contexts which bears a close resemblance to more recent descriptions. That "context of situation" is best used as a suitable schematic construct to apply to language events...A context of situation for linguistic work brings into relation the following categories:

A.   **The relevant features of the participants** : persons, personalities.
    (i)   The verbal action of the participants.
    (ii)  The non-verbal action of the participants.
B.   **The relevant objects**.

C.   **The effect of the verbal action** (Firth :182)

Hymes proposes about ten features of context of situation, which are mentioned below with a little description.

*    **Addressor:**  an addressor or is the speaker or the writer who produces the utterance.
*    **The addressee:** the addressee is the hearer of the reader who is the recipient of the utterance.
*    **Audience:** Hymes also distinguishes the audience as the audience may contribute to the impact of the event.
*    **Topic**: the topic is the subject matter which is talked about.
*    **Setting**: this is time and place where the event takes place in term of physical relations of the interactants with respect to postures, gesture, and facial expressions.
*    **Channel**: it is the form of communication like, speech, writing, signing, smoke signals etc.
*    **Code:**  it is what language, or dialect, or style of language is being used.
*    **Message-form**: what form is intended - chat, debate, sermon, fairy-tale, sonnet, love-letter etc.
*    **Event**: the nature of the communicative event within which a genre may be embedded - thus a sermon or prayer may be part of the larger event, a church service.

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* **Key:** it involves evaluation- is it a good sermon, a pathetic explanation etc?
* **Purpose**: what did the participants intend should come about as a result of the communicative event.

    Another philosopher Lewis (1972) calls the features of context as co-ordinates of index. Thus he specified eight co-ordinates of index.
* **Possible-world co-ordinate**: this is to account for states of affairs which might be , or could be supposed to be or are.
* **Time co-ordinate**: to account for tensed sentences and adverbials like today or next week.
* **Place co-ordinate:** to account for the sentences like here it is.
* **Speaker co-ordinate**: to account for entrances which include first person reference (I, me, we, our, etc.)
* **Audience co-ordinate:** to account for the sentences which including you, yours, yourself, etc.
* **Indicated object co-ordinate**: to account for the sentences containing demonstrative phrases like this, those, etc.
* **Previous discourse co-ordinate**: to account for sentences including phrases like the later, the aforementioned, etc.
* **Assignment co-ordinate:** an infinite series of things (sets of thing, sequences of things...)

**Inference:** Another way to dive into the depth of a text is inference. It helps the reader or the hearer to accede to the speaker's or writer's intended meaning. We often have to rely on some processes to reach an interpretation of a text or to bridge between the texts. According to Wikipedia, "Inferences are steps in reasoning, moving from premises to conclusions". Another definition from Merriam-Webster Dictionary can clarify further the definition of inference, "The act or process of reaching a conclusion about something from known facts or evidence". An example can also cleanse the idea such as,

> Fact: A lion can run 50 miles per hour.
> Fact: A cheetah can run faster than 50 miles per hour.

**Conclusion:** A cheetah can run faster than 50 miles per hour.

We can reach non-factual inference based on non-factual, even non-verbal information, such as facial expression and body language. According to Wikipedia inference has been classified into three kinds: deduction, induction, and abduction.

**Deductive Inference:** it is inference deriving logical conclusions from premises known or assumed to be true, with the law of valid inference being studied in logic. For example,
– All men are mortal.
– Socrates is a man.
– Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

**Inductive Inference:** It is an inference from particular premises to a universal conclusion. For example. All biological life forms that we know of depend on liquid water to exist.

Therefore, if we discover a new biological life form it will probably depend on liquid water to exist.

**Abdicative Inference**: It is a form of logical inference which starts with an observation then seeks to find the simplest and the most likely explanation. In abdicative inference, unlike in the deductive inference, the premises do not guarantee the conclusion. One can understand abdicative inference as inference to the best explanation, although not all uses of the terms abduction and inference to the best explanation are exactly equivalent. (Wikipedia).

**Some other types of inference in discourse analysis**
Besides, different types of inferences have been identified. They are the main categories that are frequently mentioned in the literature. Kispal Anne (2008) mentioned several types of inference which are presented below in a table :

| Name | Example | Explanation |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence or inter-sentence or text-connecting | Peter begged his mother to let him go to the party. | Maintains textual integrity. The reader would have to realize that the pronouns 'his' and 'him' refer to Peter to fully understand this sentence. |
| Elaborative or gap-filling or knowledge-based | Katy dropped the vase. She ran for the dustpan and brush to sweep up the pieces. | Enriches the mental representation of the text. Drawing upon life experience and general knowledge, the reader would have to realize that the vase broke to supply the connection between these sentences. |
| Local<br><br>Includes:<br><br>1. coherence inferences<br><br>2. case structure role assignments<br><br>3. antecedent causal inferences | As above<br><br>Dan stood his bike against the tree.<br><br>He rushed off, leaving his bike unchained. | Creates a coherent representation at the local level of sentences and paragraphs. As above<br><br>The reader would realize that the tree is assigned to a location role.<br>The reader would infer that Dan was in a hurry and left his bicycle vulnerable to theft. |
| Global | Inferences about the theme, main point or moral of a text. | To create a coherent representation of the whole text, the reader would infer over-arching ideas by drawing on local pieces of information. |
| On-line<br><br>Off-line | Super ordinate goals of characters or causal antecedents that explain why something is mentioned in the text. Forecasting future episodes in a text. | These inferences are necessary to understanding and are drawn automatically during reading.<br><br>Inferences drawn strategically after reading, usually during a later retrieval task. Not essential to understanding. |

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**Cognitive processes involved in drawing an inference**:
**Start**: an inference is prompted
*   Either by the activation of a whole scheme
*   Or by firing one of Graesser's 'production rules'
**Middle**: a mental puzzle or syllogism is formed
*   Either through construction of an unsolved equation
*   Or by noticing an inconsistency in the text
**End:** an inference is produced
*   The 'mediating idea' or the 'solution' to the equation is the inference
*   The inference is verified by a 'reality check' against background knowledge

This information is akin to knowing the mechanics of riding a bicycle, which alone do not make the rider a good cyclist. Knowing these steps is not sufficient to prepare a teacher to improve inferencing in her /his pupils, nor would explicit explanation of the cognitive processes necessarily help pupils to carry them out.
Factors common to those who are adept at automatic inferencing:
*   a competent working memory
*   being an active reader who wants to make sense of the text
*   monitoring comprehension and repairing inconsistencies
*   a rich vocabulary
*   a wide background knowledge
*   sharing the same cultural background as that assumed by the text.
**Reference:** Another thing that assists to reader or hearer to grasp the meaning from the text is reference. Reference is an act in which a speaker, or writer, uses linguistic forms (referring expression) to enable a listener, or reader, to identify something. Lyons (1968:404) holds out that "the relationship which holds between words and things is the relationship of reference: words refer to things." (404) But according to Strawson, "referring is not something an expression to do; it is something that someone can use an expression to do."(54) An example will better illustrate the fact such as
A:  my uncle is coming home from Canada on Sunday + he's due in+
B:  how long has he been away for or has he just been away?
Here 'He' refers to ' my uncle'. And the second speaker who is also hearer also duly accepts that the first speaker has an uncle who is coming from Canada.
**Different types of reference**: There are three types of reference such as Exophoric, Endophoric and Cataphoric reference.
**Exophoric Reference**: Here the reference does not lie within the text rather the readers or hearers look elsewhere for the interpretations. This type of reference is called Exophoric reference. For example, look at that. (that =   The Sun in the sky)
**Endophoric Reference**: Here the interpretation lies within the text. For example, look at the Sun. It is going down quickly. (Here it refers to the sun and this is within the text.)

**Cataphoric Reference** : Where the reader or the hearer looks forward in the text for the interpretation. For example, it is going down quickly, the sun. (Here it refers forwards to the sun.)

**Referring expressions**: There are heated debates in Philosophy and Linguistics on the nature and status of expression as the usability to refer. It revolves around its truth, existence, and uniqueness and concerns with cited in the isolation. But the linguistic expression has to be in definable context for a particular purpose rather than potential use of such expression. There are some indefinite expressions such as a man, a rainbow, a beautiful girl, and a line which is used to introduce entities in a discourse and the speaker intends the hearer to recognize that here is an individual entity referred to by the expression used. There are recognizable circumstances in which an indefinite expression is unlikely to be taken as a referring expression. For example,

My father was a stonemason.

Here the speaker does not introduce two distinct individuals rather the same person. The indefinite noun phrase has become the predicate of the subject noun phrase. So, indefinite noun phrase is not used as referring expression when it appears as the compliment of the verb "to be".

Another generally recognized condition in which indefinite noun phrases may not be treated as referential is when they occur in a linguistic context which is referentially opaque. Referential opacity occurs after certain verbs, such as "look" for, and "want". The examples are

Virginia wants a new job.
Marion is looking for a rubber.

Uttering this particular sentence in a particular occasion, the speaker might have a specific referent in mind. That is he is referring to a specific rubber. However, the indefinite expression, a rubber means any rubber. Sometimes some indefinite expression may have definite reference depending on the context and intention of the speaker. For example,

Someone (and I know who) won't like this proposal.
Someone (and I don't know who) has stolen my bicycle.

**Proper names as reference**: The use of proper names as referring expression is generally a less controversial issue. Plato, Elizabeth, Socrates et al., help the reader or hearer to identify the individual uniquely when they are used in a specific context. But when the context changes the proper names become indefinite nouns. For example,

He is a Plato of this age.

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Here obviously he does not refer to the Greek philosopher Plato. Sometimes those proper names become something else. For example,

Plato is on the bottom shelf of the bookcase.

Here , of course, Plato means his works or books. Proper names are also used as role-related aspects. For example,

Young Smith is the Plat of the fourth form.

It means Young Smith is acting as a role-model in the drama.

Reference is clearly tied to the speaker's goals (to identify something) and the speaker beliefs (can the listener be expected to know that particular something?) in the use of language.

**Referential and Attributive Uses**

Example: He wants to marry 'a woman with lots of money'.

It can designate an entity that is known to the speaker only in terms of its descriptive properties. The word 'a' could be replaced by 'any' in this case. This is sometimes called an attributive use, meaning 'whoever/whatever fits the description'. It would be distinct from a referential use whereby I actually have a person in mind  instead of using her name or some other description.

**Role of Co-Text**: Our ability to identify intended referents actually depend  on more than our understanding of the referring expression. It has been aided by the linguistic material, or co-text, accompanying the referring expression. The referring expression actually provides a range of reference, i.e. a number of possible referents.

a. 'The cheese sandwich' is made with white bread. (food)

b. 'The cheese sandwich' left without paying. (person)

While the phrase 'the cheese sandwich' stays the same, the different co-texts lead to different types of interpretations in each case. Of course, co-text is just linguistic part of the environment in which a referring expression is used. The physical environment, or context, is perhaps more easily recognized as having a powerful impact on how referring expressions are to be interpreted.

**Presupposition:**  Another most important element to understand the meaning of a text is the presupposition. It is a kind of assertion and assumption that both the speaker and the hearer or reader take it for granted to be true or an existing factor. Given supports the idea that "presupposition is defined in the term of assumptions the speaker makes about what the hearer is likely to accept without challenge". (50) Another definition given by Stalnaker  that, " presuppositions are what is taken by the speaker to be the common ground of the participants in the conversation". (321) For example,

Jack no longer smokes.

Here the presupposition is that Jack once used to smoke. Another example will clarify the matter more :

a. My uncle is coming from America tomorrow.

b. How long has he been staying abroad?

Here the accepted common fact is that the speaker has an uncle who is coming from America that the hearer took it for granted. A presupposition remains as the same whether the utterance is placed in an assertion, denial, or questions. Negation of an expression does not affect the common ground of an assertion. For example,

     1. I want to do it again.

     2. I don't want to do it again.

Here in both cases the matter of fact is that the subject has done it once.

Projection of Presuppositions : A presupposition of a part of an utterance is at times a presupposition of the whole utterance or may not be. For example,

     1. John thinks that my wife is beautiful.

     2. John said that my wife is beautiful.

The utterance "my wife" triggers the presupposition that I have a wife that asserts in the first example but in the second example it doesn't. In the second sentence, John might be mistaken about his belief that I have a wife, or he might be deliberately trying to convey the misinformation to his audience.

**Presupposition Triggers:** A presupposition trigger is a linguistic structure or lexical item that is responsible for presupposition. Some presupposition triggers are discussed below :

**Definite Description:** The definite description structure will be like "The X" where X is a noun phrase. The description is supposed to be proper when the phrase indicates exactly one object and it is improper when it indicates potentially more than one referent. For example, the President of U.S.A. Here it means the definite one person who is the President of America but has potentially more than one referent. But in the example below it is unique :

     Bill saw the man with two heads.

 It means there exists a man with two heads.

**Implicative Verbs:** There are some implicative verbs such as manage, forget, ought to, happen, plan, intent, avoid, etc that make objects as predicates and that results into presuppositions. For example,

Mickel tried to open the file.

**Factitive Verbs:** In Western epistemology, there is a tradition originating with Plato of defining knowledge as justified true belief. On this definition, for someone to know X , it is required that X be true. Thus the expression turns into a rational predicate. Some factitive predicates are regret, aware that, realize that, odd how, know, be sorry that, be proud that, be indifferent that, be glad that, be sad that, etc. For example.

     John realized that he was in debt.

     Presupposition: John was in fact in debt. (Wikipedia)

**Change of State:** There are some verbs that indicated the change of states of the subject and thus it results into presupposition. For example,

     John stopped teasing his wife.

Presupposition: John had been teasing his wife.
Some further change of state verbs are: start, finish, carry on cease, take, leave, enter, come, go, and arrive, etc.
**Iterative:** Some iterative adverbs such as again, anymore, another time, to come back, repeat, return, etc, also indicate presuppositions. For example,
The flying saucer came again.
Presupposition: The flying saucer came before.

**Temporal Clauses:** Some time clauses also indicate presuppositions. Some temporal clauses are before, after, since, during whenever and as. For example,
        Since Churchill died , we have lacked a leader.
        Presupposition: Churchill died.
**Cleft sentences**: for example,
Cleft construction : It was John that kissed Rosie.
Presupposition : Someone kissed Rosie.
**Comparisons and Contrasts:** Some comparative constructions indicate presuppositions. For example, Carol is better linguist than Barbara. Here the presupposition is Barbara is a linguist.
Some other presupposition triggers are counterfactual conditionals, questions and possessive case.
**Implicatures**: Implicatures also play a vital role to decipher meanings from a text. The term "implicature" is used by Grice(1975) to account for what a speaker can imply, suggest, or mean, as distinct from what the speaker literally says. There are two types of implicatures,
1.  **Conventional**: It is determined by the conventional meaning of the words used, for example:  He is an English; he is, therefore, brave.
Here he has been related and identified with word, English , as a nation who are traditionally accepted worldwide to be the brave nation. So he is supposed to be brave like the English. If it turns out that the individual in question is an English-man, and not brave, then the implicature is mistaken, but the utterance need not be false.
**2. Conversational :** It is derived from a general principle plus a number of maxims which speakers will normally obey. It includes conventional implicatures. The general principle is called 'co-operative principle'. Grice presents it as "Make your conversational contribution such as is required , at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged."(45) The conversational conventions, which support co-operative principle, are as follows:
**Quantity**: Make your contribution as informative as is required( for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
**Quality:** Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**Relation**: Be relevant.
**Manner:** Be perspicuous. Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly.

Grice does not suggest that this is an exhaustive list. But we might observe that the instruction 'Be relevant' seems to cover all other instructions. However, by providing a description of the norms speakers operate within conversation. Grice makes it possible to describe what types of meaning a speaker can convey by flouting one of these maxims. This flouting of a maxim results in the speaker conveying, in addition to the literal meaning of his utterance, an additional meaning, which is a conversational implicature. For example,

> A:  I am out of petrol.
> B:  There is a garage round the corner.

Here the speaker B is flouting the maxim 'Be relevant' and he is gratuitously stating a fact about the world via the literal meaning of his utterance. The implicature derived from the assumption that speaker B is adhering to the co-operative principle, is that the garage is not only round the corner, but also will be open and selling petrol. We might also note that, in order to arrive at the implicature, we have to know certain facts about the world that garages sell petrol, and that round the corner is not a great distance away. We also interpret A's remark not only as description of a particular state of affairs, but as a request for help.

To sum up, implicatures are pragmatic aspects of meaning, and have certain identifiable characteristics. They are partially derived from the conventional or literal meaning of an utterance. They are produced in specific context shared by the speaker and hearer. They depend upon recognition by the speaker and the hearer of the co-operative principle and its maxims.

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