

**ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD**  
**(Department of English Language & Applied Linguistics)**

**WARNING**

1. **PLAGIARISM OR HIRING OF GHOST WRITER(S) FOR SOLVING THE ASSIGNMENT(S) WILL DEBAR THE STUDENT FROM AWARD OF DEGREE/CERTIFICATE, IF FOUND AT ANY STAGE.**
2. **SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS BORROWED OR STOLEN FROM OTHER(S) AS ONE'S OWN WILL BE PENALIZED AS DEFINED IN "AIOU PLAGIARISM POLICY".**

**Course: Semantics and Discourse Analysis (5666)**

**Level: MA TEFL**

**Semester: Spring, 2014**

**Total Marks: 100**

**ASSIGNMENT No. 1**

This assignment is based on the units, chapters, reading passages, and the supplementary reading material of this course. We would advise you to read the relevant chapters, units, reading passages and extracts to answer the questions that follow.

Read the following extracts that define 'Semantics' and 'Pragmatics', 'Discourse Analysis', 'Spoken Discourse' and 'Written Discourse', 'Illocutionary act', 'Illocutionary force', 'Speech Act' and 'Perlocutionary Act'. Also read the relevant course material that define and explain these terms and then answer the questions.

**Semantics** is the study of meaning in communication. In linguistics it is the study of interpretation of signs as used by communities within particular circumstances and contexts. In linguistics, semantics is the subfield that is devoted to the study of meaning, at the levels of words, phrases, sentences, and even larger units of discourse (referred to as texts). The basic area of study is the meaning of signs, and the study of relations between different linguistic units such as: homonymy, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, paronyms, hypernymy, hyponymy, meronymy, metonymy, holonymy, exocentricity / endocentricity, linguistic compounds. A key concern is how meaning attaches to larger chunks of text, possibly as a result of the composition from smaller units of meaning. Traditionally, semantics has included the study of connotative sense and denotative reference, truth conditions, argument structure, thematic roles, discourse analysis, and the linkage of all of these to syntax.

**Semantics** is the study of the meaning of linguistic expressions. The language can be a natural language, such as English or Urdu, or an artificial language, like a computer programming language. Meaning in natural languages is mainly studied by linguists. In fact, semantics is one of the main branches of contemporary linguistics. Anyone who speaks a language has a truly amazing capacity to reason about the meanings of texts. Take, for instance, the sentence, 'I can't untie that knot with one hand'. You can easily infer the following:

1. The sentence is about the abilities of whoever spoke or wrote it. (Call this person the speaker.)
2. It's also about a knot, maybe one that the speaker is pointing at.
3. The sentence denies that the speaker has certain ability. (This is the contribution of the word `can't'.)
4. Untying is a way of making something not tied.
5. The sentence doesn't mean that the knot has one hand; it has to do with how many hands are used to do the untying.

The meaning of a sentence is not just an unordered heap of the meanings of its words. If that were true, then `Cowboys ride horses' and `Horses ride cowboys' would mean the same thing. So we need to think about arrangements of meanings.

This idea that meaningful units combine systematically to form larger meaningful units, and understanding sentences is a way of working out these combinations, has probably been the most important theme in contemporary semantics.

Linguists who study semantics look for general rules that bring out the relationship between **form**, which is the observed arrangement of words in sentences and **meaning**. This is interesting and challenging, because these relationships are so complex. To assign meanings to the sentences of a language, you need to know what they are. It is the job of another area of linguistics, called **syntax**, to answer this question, by providing rules that show how sentences and other expressions are built up out of smaller parts, and eventually out of words. The meaning of a sentence depends not only on the words it contains, but on its syntactic makeup. Because the meaning of a sentence depends so closely on its syntactic structure, linguists have given a lot of thought to the relations between syntactic structure and meaning.

You would expect an expert in semantics to know a lot about what meanings are. But linguists haven't directly answered this question very successfully. This may seem like bad news for semantics, but it is actually not that uncommon for the basic concepts of a successful science to remain problematic: a physicist will probably have trouble telling you what time is. The nature of meaning and the nature of time is foundational questions that are debated by philosophers.

We can simplify the problem a little by saying that, whatever meanings are, we are interested in literal meaning. Often, much more than the meaning of a sentence is conveyed when someone uses it. Suppose someone says `I have to study' in answer to `Can you go to the movies tonight?' The person means that she or she has to study that night, and that this is a reason why she/he can't go to the movies. But the sentence she used literally means only that she has to study. Nonliteral meanings are studied in pragmatics, an area of linguistics that deals with discourse and contextual effects.

Semantics probably won't help you find out the meaning of a word you don't understand, though it does have a lot to say about the patterns of meaningfulness that you find in words. It certainly can't help you understand the meaning of one of Shakespeare's sonnets, since poetic meaning is so different from literal meaning. But as we learn more about semantics, we are finding out a lot about how the world's

languages match forms to meanings. And in doing that, we are learning a lot about ourselves and how we think, as well as acquiring knowledge that is useful in many different fields and applications.

**Pragmatics** is the study of the ability of natural language speakers to communicate more than that which is explicitly stated. The ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning is called **pragmatic competence**. Another perspective is that pragmatics deals with the ways we reach our goal in communication. Suppose a person wanted to ask someone else to stop smoking. This could be achieved by using several utterances. The person could simply say, 'Stop smoking, please!' which is direct and with clear semantic meaning; alternatively, the person could say, 'Whew, this room could use an air purifier' which implies a similar meaning but is indirect and therefore requires pragmatic inference to derive the intended meaning.

Pragmatics is regarded as one of the most challenging aspects for language learners to grasp, and can only truly be learned with experience. Pragmatics was a reaction to structuralist linguistics which emphasised upon the idea that language has an analyzable structure, composed of parts that can be defined in relation to others. Pragmatics differs from linguistics in its main areas of interest, which are:

- The study of the speakers' meaning, which means focusing not on the phonetic or grammatical form of an utterance, but instead on what are the speakers' intentions and beliefs.
- The study of the meaning in its context, and the influence that a given context can have on the message. It requires knowledge of the speakers' identities, and the place and time of the utterance.
- The study of implicatures, i.e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed.

The study of the relative distance, both social and physical, between speakers in order to understand what determines the choice of what is said and what is not said.

- Q.1 **What is 'Semantics' and what is 'Pragmatics'?** What are the main difference /s between the two? **(15)**
- Q.2 How would you **distinguish between 'Speaker Meaning' and 'Sentence Meaning'?** **(15)**
- Q.3 Distinguish between these three terms: **(15)**
- i. Meaning
  - ii. Form
  - iii. Function
- Q.4 'An utterance is a speech act that consists of the verbal employment of units of expression such as words and sentences'. Read the relevant units/chapters and write a detailed description of **what is meant by Utterance?** **(15)**

Read further:

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis can be characterised as the study of the relationship between language and the contexts in which it is used. Crystal (1992:25) defines discourse as, 'a continuous stretch of language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit'. In practical terms it centres on the actual operation of language, beyond the restrictions of grammar. Its overriding focus is on context and on the behavioural patterns that structure the social functions of a language, above and beyond the construction of structural models.

Any communicative function must include grammatical and phonological elements, but in real life situations: context, situation, purpose, pitch, intonation and gesture can play a decisive role in the process of comprehension. Given that the goal behind any communicative interaction is to get a message across, there can be no doubt that a coherent message will also be a more effective and efficient one.

The introduction of discourse analysis added a new frame to the understanding of language and its usage, and in this sense has given the teacher new tools with which to cater for students' needs. If we consider that comprehension and understanding are the primary concerns behind most forms of communication, be they written or oral, formal or informal, then our focus as teachers should be centred on ensuring that our students manage to acquire the skills necessary for such comprehension.

Furthermore, discourse analysis can bring to the forefront considerations that may be of use in terms of the students' use of the target language. In this sense it is important to be acquainted with any potential similarities, or differences, between the students' L1 and the L2 they are learning. In this paper we shall look at discourse analysis, focusing on the use of cohesive devices and more specifically on discourse markers as a useful tool to enable students to make logical connections and coherent stretches of both written and spoken discourse.

Before analysing the differences between oral and written discourse we need to look at some general aspects of discourse. Discourse may have any number of interlocutors, from a single signpost to a heated parliamentary debate. Discourse may vary in degrees of formality and structure, as well as in the object it purposes. When interpreting discourse, a certain amount of procedures are activated within the listener/reader, which facilitate its interpretation. The listener/reader will search for coherence, and meaning, within the linguistic and contextual knowledge of the language and the situation, as well as in the conceptual and formal schemata at his disposal.

The objective of discourse analysis is, therefore, to make explicit the interaction of all these factors that lead to coherence. In order to achieve this, spoken and written language must be dissected in various ways to permit a better understanding of discourse.

#### **Spoken Discourse**

Spoken discourse, especially conversation, is possibly the form of discourse that poses

the greatest problems in terms of analysis given its apparently unstructured nature. The number of interlocutors may vary and the use of non-verbal expressions can add to the difficulty of its analysis, given the use of 'talking turns' as McCarthy (1991:69) calls them, and the real possibility of interruptions and interjections, which nonetheless are part of discourse.

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) suggest a three tier approach, beginning-middle-end, to focus on the distinct 'moves' that take place in discourse, be they 'question-answer-comment' as in a classroom environment, or 'command-acknowledgment-polite formality', as occurs in a shop between the client and the shopkeeper. What is more, there is no need for the moves to be verbal, as a grunt of approval or a mere 'uh-huh' may serve as a 'move' in many cases.

### **Written Discourse**

When analysing a written text, the situation would seem different, as we are dealing with a structured, pre-planned, possibly revised discourse from one sole interlocutor. Furthermore, writing can be construed as more of a stand alone medium, as compared to spoken discourse, which is more contextual or situational. Another important difference lies in that written discourse does not allow for the possibility of playing with intonation and pitch, which can serve as discourse markers in verbal discourse.

Having said this, we must not assume that an excerpt of speech will be necessarily more complex than an excerpt of written discourse; taken out of context they should both pose similar problems. It would seem clear that in terms of analysis, a sentence will be a more effective unit of discourse within written discourse, as compared with spoken discourse, but in terms of written discourse analysis a paragraph or a longer section may prove to be more effective.

Assuming that discourse, of any kind, can be fragmented into sections, or 'moves', understanding the meaning of the discourse requires that the segments not only explain the purpose but that they be coherent, to avoid misunderstanding the message. Furthermore, these segments must be signalled, to ensure that other parties understand them as such. The use of 'cohesive devices', or clues, in discourse can therefore serve to send signals as to the fact that these sections are differentiated, and as to how this should be interpreted.

### **Discourse markers**

Discourse markers, although similar to the previous cohesive devices, given that they presuppose a textual sequence and signal a relationship between the segments of discourse, deserve to be treated in a separate manner, as they do not lead to a search for a referent or meaning. Furthermore, they are fairly elusive as single word conjunctions and can easily become phrasal, or clausal conjunctions.

Parrot (2002:302) gives a clear definition and states some of the different functions and uses of discourse markers:

- To 'signpost' logical relationships and sequences - to point out how bits of what we say and write relate to each other.

- To 'manage' conversations - to negotiate who speaks and when, to monitor and express involvement in the topic.
- To influence how the listeners or readers react.
- To express our attitude to what we say and write.

As Parrot goes on to state, 'there is no universally agreed way of classifying discourse markers; nor is there an exhaustive inventory of them'. The term discourse marker itself, and what it applies to is under debate. Most grammars and teaching materials, use it to cover a wide variety of words and expressions, although some use the term conjunction for written linkers and discourse markers only for those in a spoken context. In this paper I have used the terms discourse marker, conjunction and connector interchangeably to cover cohesive devices that join sentences or clauses together.

There are several different classifications for the meaning and functions of discourse markers, though the most often referred to are :

- Adversative – The information in the second sentence qualifies the information in the first.
- Additive – To present additional information.
- Temporal – When the events in the text are related in terms of the time of the occurrence.
- Causal – The relationship highlighted here is one of cause and effect.

Having said this, Halliday (1985:302-9) believes that these categories are not sufficient to truly describe the form and functions of each conjunction, he suggests other categories which we can simplify into three types: elaboration, extension and enhancement, each with two sub types: apposition and clarification, addition and variation, spatio-temporal and causal conditional, respectively.

Most authors suggest the use of tables to categorise discourse markers into groups according to meaning, though Bolitho & Tomlinson (1980) also divide conjunctions into three different types according to their usage within a text. This is a useful classroom aid as it clarifies the functions of each conjunction and makes their correct usage explicit.

I believe that categorising discourse markers, though useful as a written record, can lead to some confusion and misuse, as students may believe that they are interchangeable within a text. For this reason I will continue to discuss this point under the heading of classroom applications.

Discourse analysis provides us with a greater knowledge of the mechanisms that can be used to improve and heighten discourse. In a sense, the purpose behind using discourse analysis in a classroom situation is to make sure that the students are acquainted with the different possibilities that English allows to make their discourse, written or verbal, more 'natural'. Similarly, in terms of comprehension, discourse analysis should aid the students' understanding of the existence, and meaning, of the greater picture in a piece of discourse.

Q.5 **How would you define the term ‘Discourse Analysis’?** How is ‘Spoken Discourse’ different from ‘Written Discourse’? (20)

Read further:

**Illocutionary act** is a technical term introduced by John L. Austin in investigations concerning what he calls 'performative' and 'constative utterances'. According to Austin an illocutionary act is an act (1) for the performance of which I must make it clear to some other person that the act is performed, and (2) the performance of which involves the production of 'conventional consequences' as, e.g., rights, commitments, or obligations. For example, in order to successfully perform a promise I must make clear to my audience that the promise occurs, and undertake an obligation to do the promised thing: hence promising is an illocutionary act in the present sense. However, for certain reasons, among them insufficient knowledge of Austin's original exposition, the term 'illocutionary act' is nowadays understood in a number of other ways.

**An illocutionary act is a complete speech act**, made in a typical utterance, that consists of the delivery of the propositional content of the utterance (including references and a predicate), and a particular illocutionary force, whereby the speaker

- asserts
- suggests
- demands
- promises, or
- vows

Many define the term with reference to examples, saying such things as that any speech act like stating, asking, commanding, promising, and so on is an illocutionary act; they then often fail to give any sense of the expression illocutionary act capable of making clear what being an illocutionary act essentially consists in.

It is also often emphasised that the illocutionary act is an act performed in saying something, as contrasted with a locutionary act, the act *of* saying something, and also contrasted with a perlocutionary act, an act performed by saying something. But it may be misleading to distinguish between 'kinds' of acts, for these are not separate categories of speech, but instead describe different levels on which speech might work. Any one particular speech event may have any combination of locutionary, illocutionary or perlocutionary effects.

### **Illocutionary force**

Several speech act view illocutionary force as the property of an utterance to be made with the intention to perform a certain illocutionary act -- rather than as the successful performance of the act (which is supposed to further require the appropriateness of certain circumstances). According to this conception, the utterance of "I bet you five pounds that it will rain" may well have an illocutionary force even if the addressee doesn't hear it. However, Bach and Harnish assume illocutionary force just in case this or that illocutionary act is actually (successfully) performed. According to this

conception, the addressee must have been heard and understood that the speaker intends to make a bet with them in order for the utterance to have 'illocutionary force'.

If someone says, "It sure is cold in here", there are several different illocutionary acts that might be aimed at by the utterance. The utterer might intend to describe the room, in which case the illocutionary force would be that of 'describing'. But she might also intend to criticise someone who should have kept the room warm. Or it might be meant as a request to someone to close the window. These forces may be interrelated: it may be by way of stating that the temperature is too cold that one criticises someone else. Such a performance of an illocutionary act by means of the performance of another is referred to as an indirect speech act.

**A speech act** is an act that a speaker performs when making an utterance, including the following: A general act (illocutionary act) that a speaker performs, analyzable as including

- the uttering of words (utterance acts)
- making reference and predicating (propositional acts), and
- a particular intention in making the utterance (illocutionary force)

**A perlocutionary act** is a speech act that produces an effect, intended or not, achieved in an addressee by a speaker's utterance Here are some examples of perlocutionary acts:

- Persuading
- Convincing
- Scaring
- Insulting
- Getting the addressee to do something

**Q.6 Define the following terms and illustrate your answer with examples. (20)**

- Illocutionary act
- Illocutionary force
- Speech act
- Perlocutionary act

## ASSIGNMENT No. 2

(Research Project)

Total Marks: 100

This assignment is a research project. It has the following three steps:

1. Step 1: The topics are given to you. Conduct a detailed research on any one of the topics.
2. Step 2: Write a brief research report sharing your experiences in conducting the research.
3. Step 3: Give an oral presentation based on your research/ research report.
  - Please **submit the written report to your tutor** within the scheduled time.
  - Once the tutor returns your report with feedback, you will have to **give an oral presentation on the same**.
  - The day/date of the presentation will be assigned to you by your tutor or by the person concerned at the respective regional campus/office.
  - Please **read the booklet “How to Write Formal Reports and Give Presentations: A Guide for TEFL Students”** that you may have received in your earlier study packets to help you with this assignment.

Both the components (written report and oral presentation) carry marks as given below:

- Written report 40 marks
- Oral presentation: 60 marks
- You need to score 40% marks in both the components in order to qualify for exams.

Choose any one topic from the given two.

1. Discourse analysis is the name we give to communicative study that seeks to understand how conversation or talk functions. **Take an example of a conversation or a talk and arrive at an interesting analysis. To accomplish this purpose, you will be practicing the technical and analytic skills that comprise discourse analysis by listening, transcribing, and finally analyzing.**

Now decide on the conversation you are going to analyse. The conversation or talk can occur in a store with a salesperson, in the doctor's office; among family members or friends; in political and workplace meetings; and on the telephone, basically choose a day-to-day life interaction.

**Listen to the conversation or talk, transcribe and analyse it on the lines as who the people are, their relationships, and the content of their conversation and develop an analysis of the conversation as a communicative event.**

2. This question is concerned with aspects in Semantics. Demonstrate with examples meanings expressed by speakers and meanings expressed by words, phrases and sentences.