

## An Investigation of Conversational Implicature of Functional Words in Some Selected English Exchanges

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### Abstract

English is a stress-timed language in that content words (i.e. in connected speech including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are stressed whereas functional words including articles, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliaries and conjunctions are unstressed. Nonetheless, functional words have come strong (i.e. they are stressed) under certain circumstances. Accordingly, the main aim of the current study is to investigate the implied meaning of functional words in some selected conversational exchanges that have been downloaded from the internet . The main concluding points that the study has reached can be summarized as follows: firstly, it is found that functional words have both strong and weak forms under certain contexts. Secondly, functional words are used in strong forms when speakers try to demonstrate contrast, emphasis or indirectness. Additionally conversational implicature (related to the use of functional words) is used when speakers try to shift subjects, or make overgeneralization or avoid confrontation.

**Keywords:** conversational implicature, functional words, strong forms, weak forms, exchanges.

## **Section One**

### **Introduction**

#### **Preliminaries**

Language is a vital means of communication and thus conversational implicature is an important part of that communication. Accordingly, the study draws attention to the fact that in linguistic exchanges or conversational utterances, many functional words have been used in their strong forms to express certain implicature meanings such as contrast, emphasis, indirectness, and so on. Besides, the study is an attempt to investigate the implied meaning of these functional words in some selected English exchanges.

#### **Aims**

The study is mainly meant to investigate the conversational implicature (i.e. implied meaning) of certain functional words that have been used in some selected English exchanges.

#### **Procedures**

The researcher has adopted descriptive –pragmatic approach by describing the conversational implicature and functional words together with relevant concepts. The data will be analyzed pragmatically by investigating the conversational implicature by adopting Grice's model of conversational implicature (1975).

#### **Limits**

The present study is limited to describe, investigate and analyze the conversational implicature of certain functional words (including conjunctions, auxiliaries, pronouns and prepositions) in terms of pragmatic aspects (implied meaning) downloaded from the internet and in order to elicit the implied meaning of these functional words.

#### **Significance**

The study may be of value to those who are interested in pragmatics through the identification of implied meanings. Moreover, the present study would be of value to those who are interested in phonology through

learning functional words in their weak and strong forms that have been used in these exchange

## **Section Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The current section sheds some light on the salient concepts that are of relevant to the core of the study. These concepts include: pragmatics related literature including conversational implicature, the cooperative principle and maxims of the cooperative principle as well as phonology related literature including, functional words and weak and strong forms.

### **Pragmatics Related Literature**

Pragmatics is the study of the communicative functions of utterances in relation to context of use (Crystal, 2003: 304). Similarly, Finch (2002:131) states that pragmatics is the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the context and situations in which they are used .Pragmatics includes the study of speech act theory, implicature and presupposition .

### **Conversational Implicature**

Conversational implicature is a term introduced by the philosopher Paul Grice in (1995) to refer to the implications which can be inferred from the forms of utterances, on the basis of certain cooperative principles which govern the efficiency and normal acceptability of conversation. (Crystal, 2003: 228)

According to Yule (1996: 36), Grice's notion of conversational implicature refers to the communicational content that is implied non-conventionally. Conversational implicature is implied by the speaker in making an utterance and does not contribute to explicit utterance content and is not figured by lexical meaning of what has been uttered, as in the following example:

Husband: Are you having some of this chocolate cake?

Wife: I am on a diet!

In the above example, the wife asserts that she is on a diet, and implicates something different that she is not having cake.

(Thomas, 1995: 70)

### **The Cooperative Principle**

Grice (1975) points out that conversation does not comprise of a series of broken remarks but they are relational and cooperative events. Grice calls this general principle of cooperative interaction as "the cooperative principle" to follow the basic principle governing conversation it is thus based on the assumption that, in conversation, participants will cooperate with each other while making their contribution (1975: 332).

### **Maxims of the Cooperative Principle**

Grice (1975) identifies and formulates four maxims and nine sub-maxims of cooperative principle:

#### 1. The Maxim of Quantity

(i-) make your contribution as informative as is required.

(ii-) Does not make your contribution more informative than is required.

#### 2. The Maxim of Quality

(i-) Do not say what you believe to be false.

(ii-) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

#### 3. The Maxim of relation (i) Be relevant

#### 4. The Maxim of Manner

(i) Avoid ambiguity

(ii) Be brief

(iii) Be orderly

(iv) Avoid obscurity

(1947: 45-46)

For example:

Husband: Where are the car keys?

Wife: They are on the table near the hall.

In the above example, the wife has answered clearly (maxim of manner), truthfully (maxim of quality), and she has given just the right amount of information (maxim of quantity) and has directly addressed her husband's goal in asking the question (maxim of relation). Accordingly, she has said precisely what she meant no more and no less (Thomas, 1995: 64).

### **Phonology Related Literature.**

Phonology is a branch of linguistics that studies the sound system of a language. The main aim of phonology is to demonstrate the patterns of distinctive sounds in a language and Phonology is mainly concerned with the functions, behavior, and recognition of items (Yule, 2010: 42). Crystal (2003: 233), on the other hand, defines phonology as a branch of linguistics that is concerned with the study of speech sounds with reference to their distribution and patterning. Accordingly the main aim of phonology is to discover the principles that govern the way sounds are organized in languages and to explain the variations that occur.

### **Functional Words**

"Functional words" is a term used in word classification for a word whose role is largely or wholly grammatical, e-g articles, pronouns, propositions, auxiliaries and conjunction (Yule, 1995: 124). According to crystal (2003: 233), Functional words are words that help us construct sentences including articles, pronouns, auxiliaries, etc. These words have no stress, and so they are weakened. The strong form only happens when we pronounce them alone, or when we emphasize them. Similarly, Roach (2009: 89) states that functional words refer to the words that do not have a dictionary or lexical meaning in the way we normally expect nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to have.

### **Weak and Strong Forms**

Weak forms belong to the closed class category of words that is called "functional words" and these words do not have a dictionary meaning the way content words have. Thus, they are limited in number and include: articles, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs. Phonologically speaking, functional words undergo a set of modifications

in natural speech. Nearly all functional words have two pronunciation forms: a strong form and a weak form (Brown and Kondo 2006: 120). Weak forms are described of being unstressed less prominent and phonemically different from the strong in both quality and quantity. However, functional words may come strong when they occur in isolation, i.e., out of context or in final position or sometimes when denote emphatic function (Kelly, 2004: 122).

### **Section Three**

#### **Research Methodology**

##### **Introduction**

The present section is devoted to study and investigate the conversational implicature of functional words in some selected English exchanges that have been downloaded from the internet and YouTube and the procedure followed in this study is Grice's model of conversational implicature (1975). Ten pairs of exchanges have been selected from the internet including functional words such as pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliaries.

##### **Data Collection**

The present study is limited to describe , investigate, and analyze the conversational literature of certain functional words including conjunctions ,auxiliaries, pronouns and prepositions in terms of pragmatic aspect (implied meaning) downloaded from the internet in order to elicit the conversational implicature of these functional words. Ten pairs of exchange have been downloaded from Kelly (2004) and analyzed based on Grice's model of conversational implicature (1975).

##### **Data Description**

The data collected are analyzed pragmatically by adopting Grice's model of conversational implicature(1975).The data can be described in terms of phonological aspects that include conjunctions(but,and), auxiliaries (am, can , must , should , do ), pronouns include (them) and prepositions that include (from , to ).

##### **Data Analysis**

The current section is devoted to the interpretation of the data analysis. The data consists of ten exchanges.

Exchange (1)

Friend (1): My father lost all his money in gambling.

Friend (2): one cannot BUT sympathize!

In this pair of exchange, one can find friend (2) uses the conjunction (but) in its strong form as a functional word to express the implied meaning in that friend (2) doubts and does not mean what he or she said. So, friend (2) answered unclearly and untruthfully; therefore, he or she is flouting maxims of manner and quality.

Exchange (2)

Manager: In order to take that job, you must have left another job.

Applicant: You MUST have gone out of your mind.

In this exchange, the applicant uses the functional word (must) in its strong form to express illocutionary meaning which is a shock and surprise. However, the applicant flouts the maxims of quantity, manner and quality since he or she has not answered clearly, and does not give the right amount of information.

Exchange (3)

Student (1): Are not you interested in coming next week, are you?

Student (2): Yes, I AM interested in coming.

It is clear that student (2) uses the functional word (am) to justify his being very interested in coming next week, so he uses the strong form of the verb (to be) to express his or her confirmation of attendance or coming. Thus, student (2) is abiding to conversational maxims in that he or she has answered clearly, truthfully and has given the right amount of information.

Exchange (4)

Interviewer: Where are you from?

Interviewee: I am FROM England.

In this exchange, the interviewee uses the functional word (from) in its strong form to convey his or her real place of birth. Accordingly, the interviewee has said precisely what he or she meant no more no less.

Exchange (5)

Student: To whom will the assignment be given?

Teacher: I'll give the assignment to THEM.

The teacher, in this exchange, uses the functional word (THEM) in its strong form because he or she has an implied meaning that this assignment is not given to anybody except those he or she intends to give. Accordingly, the teacher flouts the four maxims of conversation since he or she answered unclearly, unfaithfully and does not give the right amount of information as well as he or she is not relevant.

Exchange (6)

Husband: I found a job!

Wife: AND ...??

In this exchange, the wife uses the functional word (And) in its strong form. She tries to impart her real implied meaning that she does not care about her husband's affair. Accordingly, the wife flouts the four maxims of conversation in that she has not answered clearly, truthfully, has not given a suitable amount of information as well as she flouts the maxim of relation since she is not relevant.

Exchange (7):

Detector: Do you know where he comes from?

Suspect: yes I DO.

In this exchange, the suspect uses the functional word (do) in its strong form to reflect his intended meaning (i.e., he asserts his knowledge) However, he flouts the four maxims since he does not give adequate evidence, he is not relevant to the topic and he is not clear and truthful.

Exchange (8):

Grocer: How can I help you, sir?

Customer: I would like SOME sugar.

The customer here uses (some) in its strong form because he tries to communicate indirectly with the grocer and he has not planned what things he should buy. Thus, he violates Gricean maxims because he doesn't express himself clearly, faithfully about his needs. He also violates the maxims of relation in that he is not relevant and maxim of quantity because he gives less amount of information.

Exchange (9):

Student: I want to borrow some books.

Librarian: You CANNOT borrow some books.

The librarian, in this exchange, expresses his real implied meaning which indicates that student is not allowed to take any books. It is found that the librarian violates the maxims of manner and quality since he does not answer clearly and truthfully and he also violates the maxims of quantity since he did not give enough amount of information to justify his answer.

Exchange (16):

Patient: what should I eat doctor?

Doctor: you SHOULD eat only light food. You can take milk and fresh fruit also.

In this exchange, the doctor uses (should) in its strong form to express his advice and moral obligation towards the patient and he did not violate Grecian Maxims. Accordingly, he said exactly what he meant and there is no implied meaning in his answer.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The results of the study prove that there are difficulties encountered by students in investigating conversational implicature of functional words due to the fact that those students are not familiar with these words and they lack knowledge, and awareness of the use of these functional words. Moreover, most participants get confused in investigating the intended meaning of these words due to the gap of the cultural background

.Furthermore, those participants tend to violate or flout Grice's maxims since they are ignorant of the main use of the cooperative principle.

### **Conclusion**

The study has reached the following concluding points:

- Almost all of the functional words have both strong and weak forms.
- It is found that functional words are used in its their strong form when there is a contrast with other words.
- Functional words have sometimes been used for the purpose of emphasis.
- It is found that speakers use implicature when they try to communicate indirectly and accordingly they violate or flout Gricean Maxims of conversation and when speakers want to change the subject or try to avoid confrontation.
- Conversational implicature may arise from the usual linguistic meaning of what is said or general knowledge.
- When speakers violate or flout Gricean maxims, this may result in ambiguity, vagueness or overgeneralization.
- 7.It is observed that it is difficult to arrive at the implied meaning of functional words without knowing the context of situation.

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## التحقق من التضمين الحواري للكلمات الوظيفية في بعض الحوارات المتبادلة

في اللغة الانكليزية

المدرس فائزة قنبر علي

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### الملخص:

تُعد اللغة الانكليزية لغة ذات تشديد وفتي بحيث ان الكلمات الاساسية والتي تتضمن الافعال والاسماء والصفات والظروف تكون مشددة بطبيعتها بينما الكلمات الوظيفية التي تتضمن حروف الجر والضمائر والافعال المساعدة وادوات الربط تكون غير مشددة بطبيعتها الا في حالات وظروف معينة تأتي هذه الكلمات الوظيفية مشددة وعليه فالهدف الرئيس من الدراسة الحالية هو التحقق من المعنى الضمني للكلمات الوظيفية لبعض الحوارات المتبادلة التي تم اختيارها من الانترنت . ومن اهم النتائج التي توصلت اليها هذه الدراسة هو ان هذه الكلمات الوظيفية تأتي مشددة وذات اشكال قوية في سياقات محددة حيث يحاول المتكلمين اظهار مظاهر التناقض والتوكيد والاسلوب غير المباشر . فضلا عن ذلك فان المتكلمين يستخدمون التضمين الحواري المتعلق باستخدام الكلمات الوظيفية وذلك لتغيير مجرى الحديث و الموضوع وتجنب المواجهة واستخدام التعميم المفرط.

الكلمات المفتاحية : التضمين الحواري، الكلمات الوظيفية ، الاشكال القوية ، الاشكال الضعيفة ،

الحوارات المتبادلة