ALTRALANG Journal
e-ISSN: 2710-8619 p-ISSN: 2710-7922
Volume 7 Issue 2 / December 2025 pp. 506-513

A Critical Reflection on The Linguistic Levels in Communicative Systems

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Received: 22/07/2025, **Accepted:** 01/10/2025, **Published:** 10/12/2025

ABSTRACT: *To say that communication serves as a cosmic force that bounds people together in a social is to utter a truism. In fact, we cannot imagine a process other than communication through with people manage to establish relationships, know others, and get in touch with the outside world. Respectively, communicative systems here will lead us to probe into the various interpretation and linguistic paradigms the term many have. The fact that this research concentrates on two major segments: The first one goes on the tittle of frameworks in communication aspects and serves the purpose of introducing interaction and transaction that are our designed syllabus to study communication by means of language. The second holds the fundamental levels in communicative systems and explains how language should work in order to reflect its effectiveness on communication.*

KEYWORDS: Interaction, Transaction, Semantics, Pragmatics, Universal Grammar.

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1. Introduction

One practical side we may distinguish in linguistics is linked with the nature of language used as a means of social communication - the transmission of information from a source to a receiver. This practical side tends to equip people with materials that may help them understand how language works to provide them with the techniques for assessing the way it which the speaker of a given community or a language provides one with information. In this respect our aim, in this paper, is to understand the nature of human communication by means of the linguistic sciences which enable us to find ways of techniques that may help contribute to a better utilisation of this human behaviour so that communication can become more effective and accurate.

At this stage of the art, our attempt is to investigate those levels of analysis which operate within the province of linguistics. These levels contribute to a better use of language so that communication between persons can improve either in way a speaker constructs his communication with others or in regard to the effect of his connection on the mind of the interlocutors. Therefore, we will first try to show how sound contributes to language and to the complex fascinating process of communication. Secondly, we will embark the study of grammar, semantics and pragmatics as an endeavour to show to what extent these levels of linguistic analysis can help to bring about a perfect communication between humans who know to what use are these disciplines. Thirdly, we will discuss the legitimacy of these fields of linguistic investigation whose presence is prerequisite for this kind of study and also justified. As a matter of fact, communication has in fact gained a lot of profits when it has invested them.

2. Frameworks in Communication Aspects.

The study of any process as complex as communication behaviour needs some systematic means which serve to connect our work coherently. So, any attempt to study communication and describe its nature should, then, be based upon a solid framework.

Sereno and Bodaken (1985) describe their framework which regards communication as a transaction. The authors comment on two other frameworks regarded useful by some researchers. So, a brief analysis of these approaches to communication will enable us to understand the nature of this cosmic human behaviour.

2.1 The One-Way Action Framework:

This approach regards messages to be transmitted in one direction only. One-time transmission of information from one person to another.

The one-way action framework holds that the message which is originated from a "source" - sender or speaker- ends hopefully in the mind of a "receiver". The hearer. Nevertheless, Sereno and Bodaken comment that even the receiver may communicate with source when he is listening. Here, a person is perhaps communicating with gestures, facial expressions, or utterances. Therefore, to treat communication as one-way action or a linear activity is considered by the authors as a mere oversimplification. In sum, to approach communications as a one-way action remains deficient.

2.2 The One-And-Off Interaction:

This approach is more sophisticated than the one-way action for it adds the notion of feed-back. Nevertheless, there is still the possibility that a person can send and receive information at the same time which is not taken into account in this framework. As a matter of fact, is it possible for person to be only a sender or a receiver of information? Are not we are able to interpret what we hear in addition to the recording of messages? So, to account for the various changes that occur in an act of communication and to create meaning for any communicating behaviour, one should consider communication as a transaction.

2.3 The Transaction Framework:

By means of this transaction framework, Sereno and Bokaden shows that communicating is essentially a dynamic interchange between communicators, both sending and receiving actively. At all times the participants are exchanging either verbal responses (words, sentences) or non-verbal responses (gestures, glances, shrugs) or other cues of their reaction to the ongoing conversation. By this transactional approach, they mean that all elements in the communication process are interrelated and interdependent.

Furthermore, the authors view that the study of any kind of communication described as transaction involves the need for four components: system, perception, meaning and process. So, we have to use these components to explain clearly the essential nature of any type of communication.

Basically, a commutative act from the part of any individual involves the systemic relationship of its elements which exist inside the individual called the "internal system". The fact that any person brings to a communicating situation his memories, hopes, attitudes, fears, values, a life time experiences, including his personality, sex, information, needs and so forth. All these elements taken together hold the whole inner psychological and intellectual complex one may infer from an individual's behaviour. Secondly, there are elements which exist outside the individual known as the "external system". It incorporates all those elements we may find in the environment surrounding the individual. They are referred to as "Publicor external stimuli". Then, the connection of information from the external stimuli (the environment) with those packed in the internal stimuli (past experience) would help greatly any individual who attempts to make sense of the outside world. This operation of perceiving is then conducted by means of the blending of the internal and external system. An illustration of this mixture is the example the authors enhance while dealing with perception. At this stage of the art, the outcome of the internal and external stimuli represents an essential component of human communication which is creation of "meaning". Thus, the individual may translate the meaning he has worked out into an act, a behaviour or a verbal message. The last component which most researchers emphasize views that connection is a "process". This term suggests the ongoing, flowing, and ever-changing nature of human communication. It is always moving forward as a continuous process exactly like life. Simply, it's impossible to stop perceiving, thinking and communicating.

To sum it up, Communication may be defined as a transactional activity within which four components are at work so that one can construct, perceive, and grasp the meaning of any human behaviour.

3. Fundamental Levels in Communicative Systems:

3.1 Knowledge and Communication:

The notion of knowledge and communication is, in fact, a subject that holds a lot of comments on the nature of competence and performance. This attempt has been argued by researchers, namely: Jokobovists, Hyetmes, Widdowson, as well as, Halliday and Hebermas. However, we shall be content with what Noam Chomsky views on this matter because of the nature of our work. On the knowledge of language, Chomsky (1965) points out that the perfect knowledge referred to, here, is the mastery of the abstract of rules by which a person is able to understand and produce any and all of the well-formed sentences of his language. In other terms, his linguistic competence. Therefore, any attempt to communicate depends upon our perfect knowledge of language.

So, any person who has the command of his language has, in fact, internalized those rules which help determine both the phonetic shape of the sentence and its semantic context. To this view, we may add that an act of communicating depends also on the interlocutor's linguistic competence and his knowledge of the topic of discourse. Communication, then, is a cooperative enterprise. What we communicate and how we proceed when faced with obstacles like ignorance of the topic discussed, or difficulties in transmitting what we have in mind, are clear topics that may occur within the strategy of communication the find as the systemic techniques employed by a speaker to express his meaning when faced with some difficult. For example: How can we avoid discussing a topic that we have not much information about it? Or, how can

we provide therapy for our language inadequacy? These are themselves very difficult topics which need investigation and research.

3.2. The Role of Sounds in Communication:

Here, our interest lies in the communication of sounds that are transmitted by speech organs in our everyday conversation. This may explain clearly the domain of phonetics in the process of communication: Articulatory, Acoustic, and Auditory phonetics.

Thane, before passing through these stages with the frame of the three branches of phonetics, we can say that any act of communication begins at the level of the brain of the speaker. At this psychological level, J.D. O'Connor (1973) distinguishes two functions: a "creative function" and a "forwarding function". He claims that the creative function serves to concave and form messages that is why it is central in performing any act of communication and demands a great deal of information stored in the brain.

Consequently, a knowledge of sounds, voices, accents, dialects, words and expressions, and so on, are very helpful in carrying out perfect communication with others. Furthermore, if we want to communicate efficiently there must be a satisfactory amount common information of our disposal. This creative function as conceived by O'Connor holds three distinguishable phases:

First, a need to communicate arises; this may be in response to some outside events or simply to some inner thought process. Secondly, we decide about the medium to be used in speech or sign languages etc. This is often determined by the situation. Thirdly, we decide about the form the message will take; imposture, interrogation, or something else. In fact, the form of the messages a person usually takes is rapidly through of and without consciously thinking about them in most cases, claims O'Connor. The message is now ready formed, so the "forwarding function" of brain takes over.

Communication in this respect, requires a perfect Knowledge of the sounds of language. The fact that every speaker of a language should, then, know how to distinguish between phonemes (labials, alveolar, or pharyngeal), recognize stress and anticipate when it falls, able to know what intention conveys in decoding messages, know the permitted segment and sequences in his language, and recognize the super segmental features (including: stress, tone, rhythm), etc.

In this sense, the internalisation of sounds and the recognition of the way they work are of crucial importance in the performance of any communicating act; which we do hope to be correct and to sound clear enough for the hearer to understand it.

Let us now move to the following paradigms which play fundamental roles in our study: Grammar, Semantics, and Pragmatics perform in the process of establishing better communication.

3.3 Grammar and Communication are Complementary.

The role of Grammar in communication is very crucial since the two segments are interdependent.

Grammar is, in fact, the back-bone of language. Every speaker of a language should understand perfectly the rules of grammar in order to communicate with others effectively. Grammar should, then, be taught as the basis so that to help the realization of communication.

Thus, as a consequence of the research that has taken place upon many languages of the world, grammarians reveal that the theory of grammar should rely on some universal principles which are more elaborated; in the sense that, they not only discuss the form of words but also their structure, grammatical categories and their functions within sentences. Syntacticians have also assumed that the mind of any speaker of a language be it Arabic, French, or English, etc, is endowed to these principles of universal grammar, but this does not exclude, of course, variability because grammar is also composed of a set of parameters which may be true for one language and not for another. Actually universal grammar is based upon some parameters which have only been very recently introduced and of which we know very little about. Whatsoever, we are not going to deal with these things but rather concentrate on that intrinsic relationship between grammar and communication. In other terms, we shall analyse universal grammar, and see to what extent it helps in the

realization of an effective utilization of language. About this matter Chomsky (1972 : 18) writes in this context that : " At the crudest level of description, we may say that a language associates sound and meaning in a particular way, to have command of a language is to be able, in principle ; to understand what is said and to produce a signal with an intended semantic interpretation."

This command of language, as Chomsky claims; requires the internalization of the grammatical rules we enhance earlier in "knowledge and communication". They are, in fact, referred to as the specific linguistic competence of the speaker, and allow him to determine both the phonetic shape of a sentence as well as its underlying semantic interpretation or content. However, one should stress here that some extralinguistic features may as well play crucial role in the production, transmission, and identification of speech. The speaker is influenced by the environment and the situation in which principles of cognitive structure like: memory restrictions are at work. Hence, the actual performance of language is as important in the process of language as is the competence of the speaker. This actual performance cannot be determined if we do not disassociate those factors which interact with the underlying competence. Indeed, this yields for a theory of linguistic structure that may discover all the conditions grammar encounters in Chomsky's Universal Grammar.

In order to understand how universal grammar works one should first ask: How sounds and meaning are to be represented?

Yet, these features, Chomsky says, are still more abstract. If one says, for example: "This is a good knife", it means "a knife which cuts well". This interpretation requires that the concept of "knife" is determined in function to the features we assign to it, but also, it requires an abstract "evaluation feature", adds Chomsky, that is determined by the modifier we join to the object described, namely good, horrible, terrible, etc. These we may conseder to be the most important aspects of Chomsky's Universal Grammar.

The conclusion to which this discussion seems to lead is that there are at least two reasons that make of grammar, especially Universal Grammar, the central part of language. It is first a human characteristic not shared with other species. Secondly, and most important of all, grammar is the only available means which links sounds to meaning - messages. This idea may be clearly seen when related to communication, as the main difference between language and other systems of communication is the enormous complexity of language, and it is within this complexity that we must look for grammar. The traffic light, for example, may communicate the permission or the prohibition to drive, but no more. The bee also, can only tell the direction, the distance and the amount of the nectar. But in the case of language, the possible sentences one may produce are infinite in number, which makes the task of learning the meaning of each of these countless sentences separately.

When the aim of universal grammar is to find out about the underlying competence which combines meaning and sounds together in all the languages of the world. The task of the linguist then, is to trace the boundaries of all the possible set of signals and all the likely semantic representations of these signals in any particular language. So, to achieve such a favor, we should develop a universal phonetics as well as a universal semantics that investigate the rules which determine this connection of sound with meaning. Relatively, Noam Chomsky (1972 :20) argues that "The theory of universal grammar deals with the mechanisms used in natural languages to determine the form of a sentence and its semantic content."

In this sense, the theory of universal grammar is primarily concerned with the building up of laws that govern this pairing of sound-meaning. Within phonetics this theory attempts to find out the values that determine sounds by means of distinctive features, such as: voicing, frontness-backness, stress... etc. Therefore, any symbol that falls within the phonetic alphabet should be given a set of features that distinguish it from another symbol /p/ for example, is a bilabial voiceless, and plosive sound, and is to be distinguished from /b/ which is also bilabial, plosive, but voiced sound. So while phonetics rely on these distinctive features, universal semantics in its representation of meaning suggests that the application of componential analysis on the "lescemes" is hardly sufficient in providing all the semantic features. In fact, this approach purports to handle all the various relations of lexical meaning in terms of components which

focus on features. Impossible. This may simply mean that sentences are not alike, and they may be uttered or heard for the first time, however, we manage to understand their meaning. These sentences are constituted of a highly complex system in their construction which differs from language to language. Yet, within this system there is a complex set of relations that links the sounds of a language (or their graphic representations in writing) with the meaning, the messages they have to convey. In the widest sense, grammar is that complex set of relations. It tells us what are the possible sentences of a language and provides a description to each of them.

The core of grammar is, then, the establishment of the sound relationship with meaning. As far as sound is concerned, the first point of this research has given us an insight into the role of sounds in communication. But, who decides about the meaning these sounds tend to convey? This, in fact, leads to another point of discussion to which we turn now.

3.4 The Role of Semantics and Pragmatics:

Noise does not make language no matter how systematic it is. Language cannot be considered so unless this noise has been given meaning. The branch of linguistics which is involved with the study of meaning is semantics

At the first level, a semantic analysis of language deals with all words and sentences of let's say language A, and try to provide meanings for each linguistic form according to the context in which it operates. Therefore, semantics as David Crystal (1985 :23) suggests: "...studies the meaning of meanings of linguistic forms.". To determine the lexical meaning of these linguistic forms, one may either look to their sense relations; the relation between the lexical items themselves including: synonymy, homonomy, polysemy, etc. For example: the term: "good" may be defined if we attribute a synonym to it or just an opposite word like: "bad", or, look to their reference relations, with the outside world, in which we are relating "names" to "things". In this sense, the task of all semantics is two-fold, it first deals with the way words and sentences are linked to objects and processes in the real world. Secondly, the way in which they are related to one-another in terms of the notions mentioned above. Thus, John Lyons (1985 :24) confirms that

" the semantic analysis of a given language must explain how the sentences of this language are understood, interpreted, and related to states, processes, and objects in the universe."

Moreover, the meaning of a sentence depends not only upon the semantic relations that exist between the words of the sentence and the sentence itself, but also upon the syntactic structure of the sentence. Let's consider the following examples:

a) It was easy to find the road.
b) To find the road was easy.
c) The road was easy to find.

The surface structure of these sentences is not the same, whereas the underlying or deep structure holds that the presuppositions of the three sentences are the same. All the sentences imply that "it was not in fact difficult to find the road". Thus, the syntactic structure of the sentences play a crucial role in the paraphrasing of its elements. We may then, say that: "the road" is the direct object of "find" in (a) but in (c), "the road" is subject of "was easy". In short, John Lyons delineates that

"... a semantic theory must: (i) make reference to the syntactic structure in a precise way; (ii) systematically represent the meanings of the single words (or, more generally, of the lexical elements which include also lexicalized phrases like idioms, isolated compounds, etc.); and (iii) show how the structure of the meanings of words and the syntactic relations interact, in order to constitute interpretation of sentences. Finally, it must indicate how these interpretations are related to the things spoken about."

Such a semantic theory should, then, be based upon some approaches likethe study of word-meanings, the dictionary, the componential features, their semantic representations, etc.

Above the semantic interpretation of meaning, there is another field of linguistic investigation that is solely interested in the further interpretation we may assign to the linguistic forms within their context. This discipline which is introduced to linguistics is Pragmatics.

Notably, the study of language involves two types of investigation; one deals with the way language is structured (words, sounds, grammar), and another attempts to assign these structures to their appropriate uses according to the function they perform and the information they provide, for example: an indication of one's regional and social background. Pragmatics, accordingly, is the linguistic field that now investigates respectively the structure and its relationships with use.

Clearly, everybody who wants to convey a message is, then, constrained by various factors and is therefore obliged to control both: the way he speaks to others, and the constructions he ought to use in performing his act. Thus, a person who lives within a community is caught up between the community and the rules that govern his speech. This may be illustrated by the use of those rules, or more conveniently, the norms of politeness and formality that are intuitively assimilated by native speakers, when talking to older people, people from the other sex, and people belonging to a different social class. The use of "would you" for example, expresses politeness in English and is similar to "vous /vu:/" in French. These norms may, as well, be applicable for people of the same rank, age, and sex. They are, in fact, clearly seen in those rules of "turn taking", "topic development" or "topic termination" usually called "Rules of conversation" and are used conventionally in our everyday communications. To use Levinson's terms: (1983 : 28)

" Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding."

This is among the most convincing definitions of pragmatics and stresses that the fact of understanding an utterance does not necessitate only the understanding of the meaning of words and the grammatical relations between them, but rather involves the making of inferences which serve to link what is said with what is to be assumed. Inference, here, refers to the pragmatic implications like presuppositions and illocutionary force. According to the same author: (1985:29):

"Pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate."

This further definition evokes the notions of appropriateness. It first stresses that pragmatics is assigned a cognitive ability like the other aspects of linguistic inquiry. Secondly, it conveys that pragmatic theories should predict to each well-formed sentence, a given semantic meaning, its appropriate set of contexts in which this utterance may be used. So, while semantic theories are mainly concerned with the assignment of truth conditions to well-formed formulae, pragmatics is basically concerned with the recursive assignment of appropriateness conditions.

Communication, in this sense, is not as easy task as many people would claim. There is no room for doubt that people, have always been able to know each other, grasp new ideas and communicate, in the widest sense of the word. Yet, the need to know the rules that may serve individuals to perform their communications actions perfectly are very available and crucial in facilitating the way people should talk, convey their messages, and understand what others tend to mean while interacting.

We have seen how sounds contribute to language and to the whole process of communication, and how sounds are related to meanings thanks to grammatical rules. As a matter of fact, semantics and pragmatics are as essential as the already mentioned branches in performing our communications, and their primary concern is directed to the meaning of sentences as well as the uses in which we can put them. Therefore, a deep knowledge of these systems is of paramount importance in the realization of any kind of communication whatsoever its nature and the people who perform it. Above all, linguistics is a weapon against the problems of misunderstanding, speech deficiencies, disturbance in the choice of vocabulary, ill-formed sentences, weak constructions, and so forth. But also, a threshold towards better use of language, and perfect communications between persons in consequence.

4. Conclusion

Bastically, we have first attempted to introduce the frameworks in communication aspects and tried to reveal the corrective relationships in intrisingly existing between communication and language. At this stage of research, our topic moves relatively to an analysis of some linguistic levels that investigate language and the whole process of communicative systems within this point, we have mentioned communicative competence eventhough a not so deeply; adopting the Chomskian viewpoint on the knowledge of language. This preliminary information is, in fact, designed to bring about a thorough knowledge on the whole process and constitutes the chief points in this paper.

In the same line of research, a focus relies on those instrumental linguistic levels operating in the provinces of communicative systems as : sounds, semantics and pragmatism.

In short, communication remains a preocupation of psycholinguits and sociolinguits who make probe into that part of the brain concerned with the way speech is planned and produced, as well as, the way people interact with society and the norms that govern their speech in term of their culture, thought, and environment.

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