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Impoverished pragmatics? The semantics-pragmatics interface from an intercultural perspective

Abstract: The semantic-pragmatic interface debate is about how much actual situational context the linguistic signs need in order for them to be meaningful in the communicative process. There is evidence that interlocutors in intercultural interactions rely more on the compositional meaning of linguistic signs (semantics) than contextually supported meaning (pragmatics) because actual situational context cannot help pragmatic implication and interpretation the way it does in L1 communication. At the same time in pragmatic theory there seems to be an agreement between the neo-Gricean account and the post-Gricean account on the fact that the process of implicature retrieval is context-dependent. But will this L1-based contextualism work in intercultural interactions? Is pragmatics impoverished if interlocutors can only partly rely on pragmatic enrichment coming from context and the target language? The paper argues that in fact pragmatics is invigorated rather than impoverished in intercultural communication. A new type of synchronic events-based pragmatics is co-constructed by interlocutors. Instead of relying on the existing conventions, norms and frames of the target language interlocutors create their own temporary frames, formulas and norms. There is pragmaticization of semantics which is a synchronic, (usually) one-off phenomenon in which coded meaning, sometimes without any specific pragmatic enrichment coming from the target language, obtains temporary pragmatic status. This

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pragmatic enrichment happens as a result of interlocutors' blending their dictionary knowledge of the linguistic code (semantics) with their basic interpersonal communicative skills and sometimes unusual, not necessarily target language-based pragmatic strategies that suit them very well in their attempt to achieve their communicative goals.

Keywords: impoverished pragmatics, pragmatic enrichment, intercultural interactions, actual situational context, co-construction, conventions

1 Introduction

A historical view on the semantics-pragmatics interface debate shows that in the beginning, there was recognition of the code alone. Then, Grice taught us that the linguistic code is routinely accompanied by pragmatic inference. Maximalists, such as Relevance theoreticians, tipped the balance in favor of inference over code, and previous research on intercultural communication (IC) "reasonably" assumed that in the absence of a full command of a common code and with limited core common ground lingua franca users would rely on pragmatics of the target language even more heavily. So everything has pointed to the mighty power of context both in L1 pragmatics and intercultural communication. But the thesis offered in this paper changes the balance of power described above between semantics and pragmatics, at least for intercultural interactions and shows an opposite tendency. We must be careful with the L1-based contextualism because it is based on assumed core common ground, common beliefs and collective salience that speakers of a speech community share. They understand linguistic signs similarly based on existing cultural frames, norms, and usage conventions they live with. No native speaker of American English will misunderstand the meaning of "tell me about it" in the following example:

(1)   John:- Sally is driving me crazy with her silly questions.
        Bob:- *Tell me about it.*

However, we cannot be sure that in a lingua franca situation each interlocutor with a different L1 background will be familiar with the right interpretation of the expression which is "do not tell me about it because I have had the same experience, I feel the same way." So in order for the broad non-linguistic context to be supportive in interpretation the interlocutors need common ground and a kind of collective salience that leads them to a relatively similar interpretation of actual contextual factors. The question is whether interlocutors in intercultural interactions have all that to a similar extent as L1 speakers do.

Interestingly enough one of the most significant criticisms against contextualism comes from semanticists (and not intercultural pragmatists!) like Cappelen and Lepore (2005: x) who have nothing to do with intercultural communication. They gave a strong argument against contextualism that could have been formulated even by an intercultural pragmaticist: "The common thread that runs throughout our criticism of contextualism is that *it fails to account for how we communicate across contexts*. People with different background beliefs, goals, audiences, perceptual inputs, etc. can understand each other. They can agree or disagree. They can say, assert, claim, state, investigate, or make fun of the very same claim. No theory of communication is adequate unless it explains how this is possible. Contextualists cannot provide such an explanation."

That is absolutely true. But if that is so true then the linguistic signs must have some strongly encoded meaning that is relatively the same for most speakers of a language with different background beliefs, goals, let them be native or nonnative speakers (e. g Warner 2019; Elder and Haugh 2019). I argued that the difference between L1 communication and intercultural communication can be demonstrated on a continuum with two hypothetical ends (Kecskes 2015, Kecskes 2018). There is nothing like "pure" intracultural communication (L1) or intercultural communication. Every kind of communication is in-between the two hypothetical ends. Commonalities, conventions, common beliefs, shared knowledge and the like all create a core common ground, a kind of collective salience on which L1 communication is based on. We simply have less of those in intercultural interactions that take place in temporary speech communities. However, the more time people spend together the more they create norms, conventions, commonalities to make their communication smoother and economize the speech process. As a result the linguistic signs come to have something that can be called presumptive meaning (see Levinson 2000). This is a sub-category of meaning that is neither semantic nor pragmatic. These are presumed, default interpretations, arrived at by virtue of the repeated scenarios from the past, knowledge of language and the world, and other salient information, processed with the aid of some general principles of human reasoning. This meaning is neither exactly what we have in the dictionary nor what we have in a contextualized utterance.[2] Presumptive meaning is about utterance-type meaning (abstracted), not the utterance-token meaning (substantiated in context) that is usually the focus of pragmatics. But it has direct relevance to intercultural interactions because the utterance-token meaning generated and arrived at in those interactions may not be fully compatible with what the common language – based (English) contextual understanding projects. This is mainly

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2 An utterance produced in an actual situational context.

because presumptive meaning may be attached to different conceptual contents for different English language users. A typical example can be the use of "patronize" in the following interaction (Example 2):

(2)   Korean:- Jill, do you want me to help you with your essay?
       American:- *Don't patronize me, please.*
       Korean:- You say, you don't want support?
       American:- Please just don't..... Okay?
       Korean:- Tell me please what I did wrong.

The misunderstanding comes from the differences in presumptive meaning. In Korean the closest lexical equivalent to "patronize" is "huwonhada" that conceptually always refers to something positive. However, in English the conceptual load is different depending on the collocating phrase expressed by the direct object. If one patronizes an institution, a restaurant, or a university that has a positive connotation. However, if the direct object refers to human beings the sense of the expression is usually negative.

The example may explain why interlocutors in intercultural interactions attempt to stick to words and expressions whose literal meaning is based on universal encyclopedic knowledge rather than conceptually culture – specific knowledge. This is one of the main reasons why semantics somehow overshadows pragmatics dictated by the common language in intercultural communication. In intercultural interactions there is more reliance on the common code than on the broad language faculty provided by context as interpreted in the target language (English). But again, this does not necessarily mean that pragmatics is impoverished. It rather means that since interlocutors can only partly rely on English pragmatics *they need to co-construct a new type of pragmatics* that is prompted by the actual situational need and relies on a blend of the following factors: basic interactional skills, pragmatics knowledge of the common language, pragmatic knowledge of the L1, and ad hoc created pragmatic knowledge and strategies.

In intercultural interactions speakers can hardly put vague expressions or utterances out there and expect the actual situational context to specify their meaning as it usually happens in L1. Interlocutors in intercultural encounters should be quite specific as far as semantics is concerned because that is what they share with their partners (e.g. House 2003; Kecskes 2007; Trbojevic 2019; Gabbatore et al. 2019). Pragmatic enrichment based on the target language and contextual mechanisms can hardly help the production and interpretation process in this type of interactions, rather they may even lead to misunderstandings.

So this seemingly leads us again to a phenomenon that I called "impoverished" pragmatics. Let me try to explain what is going on here.

It is relative constancy, which is the result of conventionalization and normativization, that keeps language together, and that makes it meaningful. Of course, this relative constancy refers not only to the denotational meaning and function of linguistic signs but also the way they are used by interlocutors. Language users frequently make critical efforts to find, create, shape, and keep up constancy within language use even where only little of that exists like in temporary intercultural interactions. They generate new formulas and meta-phors that do not exist in the target language, they co-construct emergent common ground, and they work out common strategies that help them make the communicative process meaningful. But what their safest bet is for relative constancy in their language use, is the linguistic code itself that all interlocutors share (at different proficiency levels) and use for communication. The linguistic code gives them more constancy than anything else including conceptual knowledge and/or encyclopedic knowledge. If in intercultural interactions inter-locutors rely on what is encoded in the linguistic signs rather than on language specific conceptual knowledge and/or encyclopedic knowledge (cf. House 2003; Kecskes 2007, Kecskes 2015; Philips 2005) they can usually have fewer bumps in their communication because literal meanings are usually quiet similar for any language users no matter what variety of English they represent. If we accept that semantics defines sentence meaning while pragmatics governs utterance meaning, can we then claim that these findings go against what we know about the semantics-pragmatics interface based on L1 research? In other words, does it mean that interlocutors in intercultural interactions rely more on semantics than on pragmatics in their language use? If so, what does intercultural communica-tion reveal about the semantics-pragmatics interface? These and similar ques-tions will be in the focus of this paper. We shall start with the review of the issues concerning the semantics – pragmatics distinction in L1 research.

2 The relationship of semantics and pragmatics

2.1 Semantic underdeterminacy

Semantics and pragmatics as separate fields of inquiry are both about meaning so they have both developed sophisticated methods of analysis of meaning. As a consequence their separation into different disciplines has caused a lot of dis-cussions and debates in linguistics, language philosophy as well as theoretical

pragmatics. But this is the first time, at least to my knowledge, that the issue is raised in relation to intercultural communication. The need for revisiting this issue is warranted by the nature of intercultural communication where, as argued above there seems to be a dominance of semantics rather than pragmatics.

The Gricean modular view divides the interpretation process into two stages: what is said and what is implicated. It is, however, overlooked that the division between what is said and what is implicated was made for the sake of utterance interpretation, and for the sake of distinguishing the semantic meaning from the pragmatic meaning of an utterance. Traditionally, semantics has been responsible for compositionally construed sentence meaning, in which the meanings of lexical items and the structures in which they occur are combined. Pragmatics has been regarded as a study of utterance meaning, and hence meaning in context, and is therefore an enterprise with a different object of study. However, the boundary between them has never been clear, especially after the so-called semantic under-determinacy view was introduced (see Bach 2004; Carston 2002; Recanati 2005). Semantic underdeterminacy describes the linguistic semantics of the utterance, that is, the meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions used. Semantics refers to the relatively stable meanings of lexical units in a linguistic system, meanings which are widely shared across a speech community using that particular linguistic system, no matter whether they are native speakers or nonnative speakers of that language. These meanings are encapsulated in lexical items as a result of their reoccurring use. They underdetermine the proposition expressed (what is said) and need contextual support to recover the actual sense to which they refer to. So the hearer has to undertake processes of pragmatic inference in order to work out not only what the speaker is implicating but also what proposition she is directly expressing (see Carston 2002).

Here, when starting discussing underdeterminacy of sentence meaning as well as speaker implication and utterance interpretation, without any detailed explanation, we need to introduce two terms that will be important for us in this paper. Saul (2002) made a distinction between 'utterer-implicature' and 'audience-implicature'. Utterer-implicatures are claims that the speaker attempts to conversationally implicate (intended by the speaker, but not necessarily recognized by the addressee). Audience-implicatures are claims that the audience takes to be conversationally implicated (recognized by the addressee but not necessarily intended by the speaker). This distinction will help us understand the behavior of both L1 and intercultural speaker-hearers.

Now let us illustrate what underdeterminacy means through a couple of examples:

(3)   A.   John should know better (better than what or whom?)

B. Mary is too old (for what?)

C. The girls left early (left what? left for?)

As you can see, these are full sentential utterances whose encoded meaning does not seem to determine a fully propositional representation, that is, one which, in principle at least, could be assigned a truth value. As the bracketed questions indicate, these examples require completion by context before they can be judged as true or false of a state of affairs. This completion usually requires encyclopedic knowledge and includes pragmatic enrichment, both given by contextual effects.

Also, example (4) reveals semantic underdetermincy when a hearer-implicature is needed to figure out the meaning of speaker-implicature:

(4) Andy to Sally:
Andy:- Did you enjoy the party at the Browns' yesterday?
Sally:- Well, I got a bit drunk, and forgot to dance with Bill.
Andy:- Hope, you still had a good time.

Although it is not explicitly formulated, it is quite clear that Sally implied that she did not have a good time. Andy managed to infer this from the utterance that did not directly and/or literally contain that information. Although the utterance was semantically underdetermined, still Andy seems to have managed to recover what the speaker wanted to say with uttering that sentence. So the utterer-implicature matches the hearer-implication (inference).

In intercultural communication, the first type of underdeterminacy does not seem to cause any serious problem. If interlocutors know the literal meaning of those words they can pragmatically enrich the utterances just like native speakers do on the basis of encyclopedic knowledge. However, the second type of underdeterminacy, where a relative match between utterer-implicature and hearer-implicature is required, may raise some serious problems because it requires not only encyclopedic but oftentimes conceptual knowledge tied to the target language. If only encyclopedic knowledge is required to make the match that might not be an issue as we have seen. If, however, conceptual knowledge attached to a frozen metaphor, a situation-bound utterance or an idiom (all specific elements of the target language) is required to process the utterer's implication that may cause mismatch between utterer-implicature and hearer-implicature or misunderstanding, as is the case, in example (5):

(5)   Jiang is talking to Monika (German student) about a survey:
       Jiang:- Monika, do you know what is wrong with this answer?
       Monika:- I think *you missed the boat* here. You did not understand the
              question.
       Jiang:- What boat are you talking about? There was nothing about a boat
              in the question.

In this example, Monika used an idiomatic expression ('miss the boat') to say that Jiang did not seem to have understood a question in the survey. However, Jiang did not know the expression. She was confused because the literal meaning of 'boat' did not fit into the actual situational context. This example reveals that underdeterminacy in cases like this may be a real problem in intercultural interaction because the actual situational context cannot help if the interlocutor does not know the figurative meaning of an expression. But, we have to be careful because there seems to be a contradiction here between what I said at the beginning of the paper and what semantic underdeterminacy means. I claimed that semantic analyzability plays a central role in intercultural communication, for what interlocutors share mostly is the linguistic code, the relatively stable dictionary meaning of lexical items. However, semantic underdeterminacy in L1 means that the encoded meaning is vague, and is in need of contextual support and/or pragmatic enrichment. How can interlocutors in intercultural interactions rely on semantically vague expressions? Are those expressions really semantically vague for them the way they are for L1 users? To answer these questions, we should discuss constancy and conventions.

2.2 Constancy and conventions

Let us quote Morris (1938: 6) who was quite straightforward about the semantics-pragmatics divide:

> One may study the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable. [...] [T]he study of this dimension will be called semantics. Or the subject of study may be the relation of signs to interpreters. [...] [T]he study of this dimension will be named pragmatics.

This basically means that pragmatics deals with concrete utterance tokens made by speakers in concrete discourse situations that are located in time and space, while semantics abstracts away from those concrete contextual factors and studies the decontextualized expression types that underlie those utterances (see Gutzmann

2014 for more discussion). From this perspective, the relation between semantics and pragmatics parallels (to some extent) the broader distinction between Chomsky's competence and performance or Saussure's langue and parole. Additionally, Carnap was even more specific about the relationship of the two by saying:

> If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or, to put it in more general terms, to the user of a language, then we assign it to the field of pragmatics. [...] If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. (Carnap 1942: 9)

This approach clearly handles semantics as an abstraction of pragmatics because it is said to abstract away from the specific aspects of concrete discourse situations in which utterances are used. So what we have so far is that semantics deals with abstract sentences while pragmatics studies "real utterances." This makes sense; however, this is not what happens in linguistics/theoretical pragmatics where *nobody is interested in real utterances* although they all say they are. Researchers rely on introspective data and data resulting from thought experiments, and create their own utterances to make their points when studying logical structures and relations instead of "real utterances." So *they do pragmatics with semantic units.* It is also crucial to note that contexts given to those examples are hypothetical and not real. Recently several researchers have questioned the reliability of data heavily dependent on the linguist's own linguistic intuition in L1 (e. g. Dąbrowska 2010; Kertész and Rákosi 2012; Kecskes 2015).

But intercultural communication is about real utterances, and research in that paradigm focuses on real utterances in the Carnapian sense. So we will need to look at the semantics-pragmatics division from two perspectives: First, we need to relate the theoretical pragmatics perspective to real utterances produced in intercultural interactions and try to explain with their help what exactly happens in those encounters. Second, we need to investigate if what we learn from the analysis of intercultural interactions can help us add some new knowledge to the discussion about the semantics-pragmatics interface.

In order to execute our plan we should further discuss the differences between semantics and pragmatics. As it has been overtly argued, we can all agree that semantics studies the literal meaning of an expression, and the subject of pragmatics is what and how speakers communicate by using that expression. In other words, semantics is more tied to the conventional aspects and relative constancy of linguistic meaning as encoded in the lexicon, while pragmatics deals with the conversational aspects of speaker meaning in concrete discourse contexts. The difference between conventional and conversational meaning is demonstrated clearly in the use of the underlined expression in example (6).

(6) Sam is talking to his friend Archie.
     Sam:- Archie, I took your girlfriend to the movies yesterday.
     Archie:- <u>Oh, what a good guy you are!</u>
     Sam:- I am sorry if you think I did something wrong.

What we have here is that Archie's response can be interpreted in two different ways. First, if we take "<u>Oh, what a good guy you are!</u>" literally, it means that Archie is actually obliged to his friend that he was kind enough to take his girlfriend to the movies either because he did not have time to go, or because he just wanted to get rid of her. Second, we can interpret Archie's utterance as ironic meaning that he is actually very unhappy with Sam's action. Here the utterance means the opposite of what it says. Both interpretations are possible, however, encyclopedic knowledge – knowledge of the world – as well as Sam's response suggests the second, nonliteral interpretation is the most probable one even without knowing what Sam's response is.

So if semantics is based on an abstraction of pragmatics, which goes without any aspect of actual situational context, then pragmatics should study those aspects of meaning that are actual situational context dependent. Semantics is restricted to what could be called (relatively) constant, that is, *actual situational context-independent meaning.*[3] In example (6) the first reading seems to be independent of the actual situational context in a sense that actual situational context does not help the hearer as expected (as it usually happens in L1). It is that reading that comes to anybody's mind if no actual situational context is given, say, the sentence is written on a board, and we ask students to interpret it. This is the literal interpretation of the sentence that is based on its compositionality. The second reading can be made possible by the actual situational context. If we bring in salience, the whole thing becomes even more interesting. If we take the actual situational context-free interpretation, the most salient meaning will be the literal meaning of the expression. If we add the actual situational context (see example 6) the most salient interpretation will be the figurative (ironic) one for both native speakers of English and nonnative speakers of English. But why will they not differ?[4] The answer lies in encyclopedic knowledge that is universal in this case. If someone takes his/her friend's girlfriend to the movies without a prior agreement with the friend, that friend might not be very happy about it. This interpretation is the result of general common sense that is not biased by any language or culture-specific factor.

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3 But not context-dependent in general because prior context is encoded in lexical units.
4 I have tried it in my class with 16 subjects (9 native speakers and 7 nonnative speakers).

Besides the two criteria, namely conventionality and constancy, there is also the traditional criterion of truth-conditionality which represents the core for the truth-conditional semantics in the Fregean tradition. According to this view, semantics concerns those aspects of meaning that are truth-conditional, which means that they are relevant for determining the truth-conditions of a sentence. Truth conditions are conditions under which a sentence is true. For example, 'Mr. Brown lives in a new house.' is true precisely when there is a Mr. Brown who has a house which is new. Truth conditions of a sentence do not necessarily reflect current reality. They are merely the conditions under which the statement would be true. Gutzmann (2014) argued that conventionality, constancy, and truth-conditionality go hand-in-hand. If we take them together we can use them as a means to distinguish semantics and pragmatics.

According to this approach, semantics concerns the conventional, constant, and truth-conditional content, while pragmatics deals with conversational, context dependent, non-truth-conditional meaning; this is summarized below:

Semantics vs. Pragmatics

Semantics	**Pragmatics**
conventional	conversational
constant (prior context-dependent)	actual situational context-dependent
truth-conditional	non-truth-conditional

But there is a problem with this interpretation from our perspective. Pragmatics is also about conventions: the conventions of usage and norms of conversational encounters. Pragmatics of a language represents a repertoire of expected conversational behavior in the culture or sub-cultures that are tied to that language. So we have conventions of language and conventions of usage as Morgan said:

> In sum, then, I am proposing that there are at least two distinct kinds of convention involved in speech acts: conventions of language ... and conventions in a culture of usage of language in certain cases ... The former, conventions of language, are what make up the language, at least in part. The latter, conventions of usage, are a matter of culture (manners, religion, law ... .). (Morgan 1978: 269)

L1 pragmatics constraints our actual situational behavior to some extent with expectations, prefabricated language and cultural frames that all kick in subconsciously and automatically when we use our L1. Of course, it is another question whether we follow those or not. But they are there and help us make sense of our communicative encounters and the world around us. Well, this is where the

problem is for intercultural interactions. This kind of pragmatic repertoire that is taken for granted in L1 is there in IC only in a limited extent and at different levels for interlocutors. In L1 that kind of background knowledge helps us make the right implicatures and detect situational relevance. This is like a frame (cf. Goffman 1974; Fillmore 1982) that affects us top-down. So in L1 pragmatics there are conventions and norms that are available to all members of that speech community. Again, it is another issue whether they use that and to what extent. However, in intercultural communication each interlocutor has different access to and familiarity with this pragmatic repertoire, and this difference as we saw in a couple of examples above (2 and 5) can cause misunderstanding. So reliance on this target language pragmatics is relatively limited. Instead interlocutors rely on universal pragmatic features and also co-construct their 'online' actual situational pragmatics. In the following section, we shall summarize what we have discussed so far, and then further look into the semantics-pragmatics interface based on what we have learned about intercultural communication.

3 Semantics growing into pragmatics in intercultural interactions

3.1 Diachronic and synchronic pragmatics

While reviewing issues concerning contextual effect above we made several important notes about how those issues relate to intercultural communication. It was pointed out that speakers in IC prefer semantic analyzability to figurative and formulaic language. Also, semantic underdeterminacy does not seem to affect their speech activities to the extent as it does in L, for they cannot count on actual situational contextual support in the same way as that works in L1. Furthermore, it was claimed that constancy and conventionality built in the lexical items for L1 users do work for IC as far as literal meanings are concerned because interlocutors in IC share the coded literal meaning among themselves depending on their proficiency. As far as the standard pragmatic model is concerned, it appears to work better for lingua franca users than for L1 users because ELF users seem to first process literal meaning, and they may stick to that sometimes even if there is a mismatch with the actual situational context. Now we must summarize the differences between L1 and intercultural communication from the perspective of the semantics-pragmatics divide.

– Semantic content and compositionality dominates both expressing intention and interpreting it. The standard pragmatic model works (literal meaning processed first).
– Linguistic code seems to play the role of core common ground.
– Actual contextual support (based on English socio-cultural background) for comprehension is not significant. Pragmatic enrichment deriving from target language is minimal: it mainly represents general world knowledge rather than language specific features.
– What is said is usually equals or close to what is communicated.
– Framing power and effect of actual situational context is not based on target language. Rather it is co-constructed bottom-up.
– The more target language-specific utterances are the less the speaker can be sure that they will be interpreted as meant.

All the above reveals the dominance of semantics over pragmatics in intercultural interactions, at least seemingly. But is that really true? How does pragmatics work for IC? Does not, in fact, semantics grow into pragmatics in intercultural communication taking over some functions of pragmatics? Or rather, are semantic features pragmatisized in IC?

It is essential that pragmatics for IC speakers cannot be just something "they communicate over and above the semantic content of the sentence," as King and Stanley (2005: 117) assumed for L1. For IC speakers, the semantic content is usually the conveyed content, or at least it is close to the conveyed content. If this is not clear from their utterance, they try to reinforce it through some pragmatic strategies such as repetition, paraphrase, or other procedures. Here is a brief exchange between a student with African French as L1 (AF) and a Korean student (K).

(10) AF:- ah … so you have good neighbors … it's quiet … good … so everybody has difficulties where they live so since you came from Korea what kind of difficulties you … what are the problems that you have to live in Albany?

K:- Ah I came … when I came here … the first time about … I applied the <u>driver's license</u> and you go to there.

AF:-   Yeah.

K:- <u>DMV … yeah, yeah … driver station</u>.

AF:-   Yeah.

K:- And then they require so many documents.

AF:-   I see.

K:-   So I had to go another office.

AF:-   To apply to school.

K:-   Yeah social number or ... officer ... anybody ... anyway I had to go there and then ... receive the document I gave them ... so long time I ... take a long time.

AF:-   Yeah so the difficulty for you is to get a driver's license here in the US.

In this excerpt we can see that the Korean student is talking about her difficulties to obtain a driver's license in Albany. There is no figurative or formulaic language use in the excerpt. The Korean student makes special efforts to make sure that the AF student can follow her. For instance, she pays attention to the backchanneling of her partner by saying "DMV", and wants to make sure that the AF student understands her properly so adds "driver station", which is an odd, ad hoc created semantic unit but makes perfect sense in the given context (about "odd structures" see Kecskes and Kirner-Ludwig 2019).

For non-native speakers – especially speakers with lower language proficiency – who participate in intercultural interactions there is little "above semantics", at least what pragmatics of target language is concerned. In L1 communication, 'what is said' rarely coincides with 'what is communicated'. This is why Gricean pragmatics gives such importance to implicatures. "Speakers implicate, hearers infer" (Horn 2004: 6). In L1 it rarely happens that nothing is implied beyond semantics of the sentence. However, in intercultural communication what the speaker says is what s/he usually (not always though) means. In most cases utterance meaning is what the corresponding sentence means literally. This fact gives a strong support to Bach's claim: "[I]t is a mistake to suppose that "pragmatic content is what the speaker communicates over and above the semantic content of the sentence" (King and Stanley 2005: 117). Pragmatics doesn't just fill the gap between semantic and conveyed content. It operates even when there is no gap. So it is misleading to speak of the border or the so-called "interface" between semantics and pragmatics. This mistakenly suggests that pragmatics somehow takes over when semantics leaves off. It is one thing for a sentence to have the content that it has, and another thing for a speech act of uttering the sentence to have the content it has. Even when the content of the speech act is the same as that of the sentence, that is a pragmatic fact, something that the speaker has to intend and the hearer has to figure out (Bach 2007: 5)." Bach's claim is true not just for L1 communication but for *any* communication including intercultural communication as well. In fact, intercultural communication confirms Bach's claim. Pragmatics does not take over when

semantics leaves off; in fact, *pragmatics is always there*. In fact, pragmatics is there even when the utterance means what the sentence says. *The semantics of the sentence is pragmatisized in intercultural interactions*. In other words, semantics and pragmatics are intertwined and almost inseparable, at least in IC. A part of pragmatics is encoded in the lexical items and utterances, and another part of pragmatics requires actual situational support in the target language (English, in the case of ELF communication). The latter is often referred to as pragmatic enrichment as described by contextualists. The problem, however, is that the diachronically semantisized part of pragmatics (semantics) does not work without the other, that is, the synchronic part of pragmatics, which comes into effect in actual situational contexts. Basically all that we call semantics is the result of pragmatic actions and processes attaching reoccurring conceptual load to lexical items and utterances in a diachronic process. Pragmatic features, actual situational experiences being standardized, conventionalized and normativized overtime grow into somewhat stabilized, relatively easily recallable semantic features. This is how word-specific semantic properties (Cruse 1992; Kecskes 2003, Kecskes 2010) of expressions such as 'chicken out', 'pass away', 'blackmail', 'kidnap', etc. develop. Actual situational context cannot cancel the conceptual load that is attached to "chicken out" or "blackmail". This "semantization" process makes language development dynamic and ever-changing. In short, semantics originates from pragmatics. The former is a summary of prior reoccurring contexts, a repository of the history of use of lexical items. It is nothing else but *diachronic pragmatics as opposed to synchronic pragmatics*. However, the semantisized part of pragmatics (or diachronic pragmatics) affects synchronic pragmatics (and vice versa), and occasionally overrides the selective power of actual situational context. The problem for non-native speakers (both EFL and ESL) is that this diachronic pragmatics, that represents a built-in conceptual load in lexical items, is not usually part of the language learning process that they go through. They learn the pure literal meaning, core meaning of the lexical items, but not the conceptual load (originator of different senses of a word) that is tied to them, and is an essential part of actual use of those lexical items.

3.2 Prior context and actual situational context revisited

When discussing the semantics-pragmatics divide, we need to explore the relationship and interplay of prior context and actual situational context in order to explain the semantically biased behavior of IC speakers. As stated earlier, prior context is tied to semantics or what I called "diachronic

pragmatics". And actual situational context is tied to pragmatics, more specifically to "synchronic pragmatics". It seems to me that the traditional semantic view (literalism) and the novel pragmatic view (contextualism) may go wrong in their way of handling the role of prior context and prior experience. As a reminder, according to the traditional view, we must distinguish between the proposition literally expressed by an utterance ('what is said' by the utterance, i. e. its literal truth conditions) and the implicit meaning of the utterance ('what is communicated' by a speaker producing the utterance). The former level is the object of semantics, the latter level is the object of pragmatics. In addition, followers of the pragmatic view emphasize the importance of semantic underdeterminacy according to which the encoded meaning of the linguistic expressions used by a speaker underdetermines the proposition explicitly expressed by the utterance.

As for the traditional view, truth conditions may be ascribed to a sentence (of an idealized language system), independently of any contextual considerations. The opposing pragmatic view says that a sentence has complete truth conditions only in context. The semantic interpretation of utterances, in other words the propositions they express, their truth conditions, is the result of *pragmatic processes of expansion and contextual enrichment*. The followers of the semantic view may not be right when they think that any linguistic sign can be independent of any contextual considerations. No linguistic sign or expression can be independent of context because they, in fact, carry context (reoccurring prior context), they encode the history of their prior use (reoccurring prior context) in a speech community. The supporters of the pragmatic view may go wrong when they do not emphasize that expansion and contextual enrichment are the results of the individual's prior experience. Suffice it to say, both sides appear to be mistaken to some extent because they talk about *context* without making a distinction between its two sides: *prior context* and *actual situational context*. The proposition literally expressed (sentence meaning) is the result of collective prior experience of speaker-hearers of a given speech community. This is expanded and/or enriched by prior experience, current situational experience and/or the communicative need of a concrete speaker when s/he uses that utterance (speaker's meaning) in an actual situational context. *The speaker privatizes the collective experience by enhancing/ enriching the content with his/her private experience*. Inferred meaning (hearer-implicature) is the reflection of the interplay between prior experience of the speaker and prior experience of the hearer in an actual situational context. Prior context as understood in the socio-cognitive paradigm is declarative knowledge while actual situational context represents procedural knowledge (see Kecskes 2014). Moreover, Bezuidenhout (2004) claimed that parallels exist

between the declarative – procedural divide, the semantics/pragmatics inter-face and the competence/performance distinction. She proposed that a clear-cut distinction must be made between procedural knowledge, which belongs to the performance system and is pragmatic, on the one hand, and the lexical conceptual knowledge, which belongs to the competence system and is seman-tic, on the other. This is in line with what the socio-cognitive approach claims: lexical conceptual knowledge is the basis for prior context that is encoded in the lexical items while procedural knowledge, which is pragmatic, is triggered by the actual situational context. To make our point clear, let us look at the sentences in example (11).

(11) Stan and Sally are engaged (to each other).
      Some (not all) boys like baseball.
      I need to change (clothes).

According to the socio-cognitive approach, all of the sentences above are complete without the parentheticals, and express a truth conditional, actual situational context-independent proposition. I want to emphasize *actual situa-tional context-independent* proposition because what those sentences are not independent of, is prior context. Prior context, reoccurring use (without the elements in parenthesis in example 11) makes their meaning clear even without the actual situational context. The speaker can say Stan and Sally are engaged true or false without concern for 'to whom'. The speaker can say some boys like baseball true or false without concern for whether all do, and can say she needs to change true or false without considering in what way (clothes? diet? priorities? career?). The parentheticals add what that speaker was talking about, specifically, an added propositional element based on the actual situa-tional context. But that is a new proposition. The one it supplants is still adequate in itself as the expression of a proposition. So I argue that *it is a mistake to claim that no sentence is complete without (actual situational) con-text*. It is more the case that speakers can mean more than the sentence itself means, because actual situational context may supply the rest. Nevertheless the sentence does say something completely, and sometimes it is exactly what the speaker means (utterer-implicatures).

In the socio-cognitive approach underdeterminacy of sentence meaning may exist only from the perspective of the hearer. The speaker's utterance is not underdetermined in any way unless the speaker deliberately wants it to be. The speaker expects that his/her utterance fits into the actual situational context, or creates an actual situational context. Let us look at this issue in L1 communication first, and then in intercultural communication. The following

conversations (12A and 12B) will support this point (examples 12 A and B are from Kecskes 2014).

(12A)   Sam is talking to his friend, Andy.
        Sam:- Coming for a drink?
        Andy:- Sorry, I can't. *My doctor* won't let me.
        Sam:- What's wrong with you?

(12B)   The same situation with one change.
        Sam:- Coming for a drink?
        Andy:- Sorry, I can't. *My mother-in-law* won't let me.
        Sam:- What's wrong with you?

In example (12A), we can see that Andy says that he cannot go to have a drink with Sam because his doctor does not let him drink. Sam's question, which is "what's wrong with you?", can definitely be interpreted as an inquiry about Andy's health. Andy's use of "my doctor" gives prior context support to that interpretation. Traditionally doctors can prohibit people drinking for health reasons. However, in example (12B), when Andy says that his mother-in-law does not permit him to go and have a drink with his friend, we can see that the whole actual situational context is changed. Based on traditional collective saliency (prior context) no one would think that Andy listens to his mother-in-law. So the question "what's wrong with you?" may mean something like "are you out of your mind?" or "are you in trouble?."

    Now let us take an example and see how this works in intercultural communication.

(13)   A Japanese student (J) and a Korean student (K) are talking.
        J:- OK it's been three or... three months so far right? Do you like living in Albany? Living in America?
        K:- Yes I like.
        J:- What makes you like this life? What is your ... like .. <u>What you like about living in Albany?</u>
        K:- <u>I stay here only 4 month in this semester so I have no time</u>. <u>I go to many place</u>... I went to Boston, Washington DC, of course New York City.
        J:- That's a lot wow.
        K:- Next month I will go to San Francisco.
        J:- San Francisco wow. West coast.
        K:- Grand Canyon, Niagara.
        J:- Oh. So many plans are coming wow.

> K:- I like traveling.
> J:- I can see that.
> K:- I like nature. The US has many nature.

In this example, the Japanese student wants to know if the Korean likes Albany, and starts with a direct question, which creates the frame of the conversation. He does not get a direct answer because the Korean begins to talk about his travel with which he changes the topic of the conversation. Here no prior context breaks the dominance of actual situational context. The same goes for the rest of the discourse segment.

So the examples from L1 and IC discourse demonstrate that context plays both a selective (actual situational context) and a constitutive role (prior context). Actual situational context is viewed through prior context. Thus, meaning is the outcome of the interplay of prior and current experience (actual situational context). We can imagine the relationship of prior context and actual situational context during interaction as a continuum.

Prior context < ——————— > **Actual situational context**

What I want to emphasize here is that there is a constant movement on the continuum. Depending on how speaker intention is expressed either or neither side can be dominant (see examples 12 A, B and 13). Also, prior context tied to salience is as important as actual situational context connected to relevance. Our experience develops through the regular recurrence of similar situations that we tend to identify with given contexts. Additionally, the standard (prior, recurring) context can be defined as a regular situation of which we have repeated experience, about which we have expectations as to what will or will not happen (Kecskes 2014), and on which we rely for understanding and predicting how the world around us works. Gumperz (1982: 138) claimed that utterances somehow carry with them their own context or project a context. Referring to Gumperz's work, Levinson (2003) argued that the message versus context opposition is misleading because the message can carry with it or forecast the context. All of this shows that semantics (diachronical pragmatics) is as important as synchronic pragmatics in language production and comprehension. But how does this work for IC speakers? I have argued several times that IC speakers heavily rely on semantics. But semantics is about historically encoded meaning, reoccurring contexts, frequent encounters and built-in collective salience. And I also said that IC speakers do have only limited access to all these things in the target language. So is there, in fact, a contradiction between these two claims?

3.3 How can speakers in IC rely mainly on what they have limited access to?

This issue is not as complicated as it looks. What we call "dictionary knowledge" and what constitutes a significant part of semantic knowledge is learnable for IC speakers. Learnability and learning is a key concern here. IC speakers who represent a particular variety of English (Chinese English, Russian English, German English, Korean English, etc.) have studied and/or experienced the target language system and vocabulary, at least to some extent.[5] Their variety of English is an approximation to what is considered a native-like variety. The process of approximation is usually characterized by learning rather than learning by using in EFL environment where the target language socio-cultural background is not directly present. This changes in an ESL environment such as immigrants acquiring English in the US where the target culture is present, and learning usually takes place through using the language in everyday situations.[6] But no matter whether the route towards English leads through classroom learning or learning by usage, what is common for everyone, no matter which variety of English they speak is the core knowledge of the system of signs that makes them "English speakers". This core knowledge consists of a basic system of signs and semantic core (vocabulary). English language learners are exposed to these two core linguistic entities in classroom circumstances and in a target language environment as well. We can agree with Swan (2012: 388) that, in a sense, EFL leads to English as a Lingua Franca use. However, we should add that not only EFL but ESL and any other kinds of learning of English will lead to English as a LF use when users of any variety of English engage in interaction with representatives of other varieties of English. In addition, Swan (2017: 513) argued that many of the world's English learners merely seek an effective working knowledge of the language, without wanting or needing a high level of accuracy. This has nothing to do with the recent growth in the lingua franca use of English or the implied existence of a new class of ELF users. So ELF users do not constitute a new class/group of English language users because, in fact, they use their own varieties of English without creating a new variety or developing some kind of normativity because there is little reoccurrence in temporary ELF speech communities. This makes standardization and conventionalization possible only to a limited extent. As a consequence, ELF users' prior context

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5 I will explain this issue relying on English as a Lingua Franca that represents intercultural communication.
6 Of course I am aware of the fact that EFL and ESL is more like a continuum than a dichotomy. Concrete learning environments usually show the dominance of either EFL or ESL factors.

background is more tied to their varieties of English than to some kind of ELF core, or norm as some ELF researchers claim (e. g. Archibald et al. 2011; Bowles and Cogo 2015). Further, Swan (2012: 381) explained the situation of many ELF users, where they disregard the native speaker norms in terms of correctness as follows:

> However, many lingua franca English speakers are certainly unconcerned about emulating NS norms of correctness except in so far as these are likely to serve their communicative purposes, and are perfectly satisfied with approximations that are transparent and effective. For such speakers it seems quite reasonable to say that the forms they use have their own validity, and should not in principle be judged by NS norms or labeled 'mistakes'.

When ELF researchers speak about "native speaker norms" and "correctness" they usually refer to semantics and grammar. As far as my definition of English as a Lingua Franca goes, I think we can talk about ELF when different varieties of English are put to use in communicative encounters (Kecskes and Kirner-Ludwig 2019). It was argued above that those varieties are usually based mainly on EFL and partly on ESL. EFL classroom learning is more about structure and semantics while ESL is more about use (practice) and pragmatics. Consequently, EFL learners need more usage-practice while ESL learners may need firmly established semantics, more core knowledge of the language to clarify for themselves why people say what they say the way the say it in English as a native language. This may give them the necessary awareness and confidence in using English for communicative purposes. So English as a Lingua Franca seems to pull together these two things. No matter what the source of knowledge of English (EFL or ESL), in ELF interaction, ELF speakers put to use that knowledge. So it would be unwise to talk about a switch between EFL and ELF or ESL and ELF. Rather, what we see here is the use of different varieties that are biased either for semantics or pragmatics. The best way to put it would be just to say that both sides (semantics and pragmatics) are present all the time among both types of speakers (EFL or ESL). The only question is to what extent this bias exists? The paradox is that *when learned semantics (diachronic pragmatics) is put to use in intercultural encounters, it is expected to function as synchronic pragmatics*. But we should not forget about an important claim of Bach according to which "sentences have the properties they have independently of anybody's act of uttering them. Speakers' intentions do not endow them with new semantic properties ... " (Bach 2004: 27). So there are no new semantic properties added when an utterance is made but those that are encoded should continue functioning pragmatically as well. So a continuum between these two hypothetical parts is justified.

Diachronic pragmatics ‹————————› Synchronic pragmatics (semantics)

To make it clear, ELF speakers enter into an interaction with a significant 'load' of semantic knowledge tainted by their variety of English and not necessarily English proper, and are expected to function with that in conversations where target language-based synchronic pragmatics knowledge is also required. But they have only limited access to that knowledge. So what they really do is that they develop their existing semantic skills into pragmatic skills by adding basic interactional competence and not necessarily target language based pragmatic competence (see Kecskes et al. 2017). But with interlocutors having that particular combination of knowledge and skills, actual situation context cannot play the same selective and determinative role in intercultural interactions than it does in L1 interactions.

The real problem is that semantics of language knowledge of non-native speakers differs from that of native speakers in two points. First, there is a quantitative difference, which is essential given the different levels of proficiency. Second, there is also a qualitative difference because of the limited conceptual knowledge of non-native speakers. They do not have full access to conceptual loads tied to lexical units and expressions that are usually language – and culture- specific, and serve as basis for idiomatic and figurative senses. It was stated above that the word "chicken out" is used as a synonym to the word "surrender." However, it has a conceptual load according to which the action of surrendering is the result of cowardice. This connotation does not need any contextual support. In fact, no actual situational context can cancel this negative connotation. So the word is immune to any contextual intrusion. A similar example could be the expression "it's not my cup of tea," whose most salient meaning is its figurative one, i. e. "it's not my favorite." In these and similar expressions the pragmatic functions have been lexicalized, so they have become word or expression-specific semantic properties (e. g. Cruse 1992; Kecskes 2008; Apresjan 2019). Thus it seems to me that this is what IC speakers struggle with regularly. The interesting thing is that non-native speakers usually have this problem only with talking to native speakers. However, as the limited access to conceptual load of lexical items is a problem for most of the non-native speakers when they talk to each other in ELF this problem usually does not occur in intercultural interactions because of the dominance of literal meaning in the use of lexical units. This may explain why semantics appears to dominate intercultural interactions. Let us look at an example for both native – non-native and non-native – non-native interactions.

Example (14) demonstrates the problem in native speaker – non-native speaker interaction.

(14)   Japanese student (J) at the check-out in Walmart. She is paying with a
        credit card. The transaction is over and the cashier is giving the receipt to
        the student.
        Cashier:- <u>You are all set</u>.
        J:- Do you need anything else?
        Cashier:- No, you are done.

After the cashier uses the situation-bound utterance "you are all set," the
Japanese student looks confused and responds with a question, which shows
her non-understanding. In spite of the clear actual situational context and the
supportive situational frame the Japanese student does not seem to understand
the utterance because she has problems with expression-specific semantic prop-
erties rather than pragmatics. So synchronic pragmatics support does not appear
to work well without understanding semantics (encoded pragmatics).

The same problem can occur in intercultural interactions when no native
speaker is present like in example (15).

(15)   A Turkish student is talking to a Korean student in front of their apartment
        house.
        KS:- Do you know where Arnold is?
        TS:- *There is a Humvee outside.*
        KS:- What do you mean?
        TS:- *His girlfriend is in the military.*
        KS:- Okay..?
        TS:- Humvees are usually used by military personal.

There was no recipient design in this conversation at the start. The utterer-implica-
ture produced by the Turkish student included two challenges for the Korean
student. He should know what "Humvee" is. [High Mobility Multipurpose
Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV; colloquial: Humvee). It is a family of light, four-
wheel drive, military trucks and utility vehicles produced by AM General. This is
the short name for that type of vehicle in American culture, which is culture-specific
knowledge that native speakers of American English are familiar with. It is the
conceptual load that is attached to the expression. The Korean student did not know
that so the actual situation context could not help the interpretation. The second
challenge was more like a common ground issue. The Korean should also know that
Arnold's girlfriend is in the military. This second one could not be inferred or
guessed without knowing what Humvee is. As the Korean's interpretation shows
neither of the utterer-implicatures went through. The Turkish student had to give
explanation in the end.

4 Summary

It was argued that, when we examine the semantics-pragmatics division from the perspective of intercultural communication, we can see a clear dominance of semantics. The linguistic code works like common ground, and utterance production is usually governed by semantic analyzability. The standard pragmatic model seems to be working better in intercultural interactions than in L1 interaction based on which it was originally developed. In IC speakers compose their utterances relying on the literal meaning of words rather than using idiomatic, figurative and formulaic language. Since hearers also process utterances based on compositionality and literalness first, understanding is not that big of a problem as studies on misunderstandings reported earlier (e. g. Carroll 1988; Gass and Varonis 1991; Pride 1985). As a result of this heavy dominance of semantics we could assume that pragmatics may be *impoverished* in intercultural interaction. But it was argued that this only seems to be the case. What in fact happens is that pragmatics is always there. It is actually invigorated rather than impoverished.

There are two side of pragmatics: diachronic pragmatics and synchronic pragmatics. The results of diachronic pragmatics are encapsulated in lexical items and called "semantics". Synchronic pragmatics is triggered by actual situational context. Meaning both in production and comprehension is the result of the interplay of these two sides of pragmatics. The only question is which side of it is more dominant than the other in any sequence of conversation or language use. It looks like in intercultural interactions the semantics side is the one that usually is dominant. But pragmatics is also there but that may be a different kind of pragmatics than what we have in L1. Pragmatic effects come only partly from the target language, rather they are co-constructed, built up bottom-up by the interactants. This is a newly constructed event-based pragmatics in which target language dominated cultural frames and conventions play only limited part.

No matter from what perspective we look at production and comprehension semantic competence (i. e. knowledge of what is literally expressed) is still the vastly most important factor in the productive and interpretative process. So for analytic purposes we should keep the divide between semantics and pragmatics. But there are reasons to be pessimistic as to the prospects of any theory of linguistic interpretation which fails to give central importance to literal meaning. Cappelen and Lepore (2005) criticism against contextualism is right. Contextualism fails to account for how we communicate across contexts. Intercultural communication attests to that. Much of

actual contextual understanding should be built bottom-up, co-constructed by interlocutors. The pragmatisized semantics that they use in interaction is the result of blending their dictionary knowledge of the linguistic code (semantics) with their basic interpersonal communicative skills and sometimes unusual, not necessarily target language-based pragmatic strategies that suit them very well in their attempt to achieve their communicative goals. Intercultural pragmatics research should focus on describing the nature and characteristic features of this process.

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Bionote

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