

Communication and Cognition; Analyzing the Semantic and Pragmatic Meaning of Salaam in Interpersonal Communications among Afghans

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Abstract

The everyday greeting and interpersonal communication in Afghanistan start with the word of Salaam, which means; peace and safety be upon you. The word of Salaam is derived from the word of Islam, which has been quoted more than 40 times in the Holy Quran. The comprehensive meaning of Salaam in the whole Quran, to explore the message of peace, safety, and humanity. The study was guided by two questions; what is the semantic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan community? What is the Pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community? This study employed The Relevance theory and the inferential model of communication. Based on this model, the study analyzes interviews with 40 Afghan students either face to face phone call conversations in the Communication University of China in Beijing, from 1 June to 31 June 2019. Findings of this study show that the semantic meanings of Salaam were to make an agreement for the rest of the conversation and making a peaceful and safe environment. Moreover, goodbye, friendly message to others, leaving the conversation, lovely message, and sending secret message were the pragmatic meanings of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community. The result of the study further shows that the implicature mean of Salaam is in the context of the word.

Keywords: Afghan community, Salaam, semantic, pragmatic, interpersonal communication.

I. Introduction

The beginning context of greeting communication is the same in all the Islamic nations around the world, people starting their greeting, meeting, speaking, announcing by a special sentence “As-salāmu ‘alaykum warahmatul Allah wabarkatuh”. Such as in non-Muslim countries, every community has special sentences or expressions for greeting or interpersonal communication. For instance, in the English environment, people say “hello”, Chinese people say “nǐhǎo”. In every community, these sentences or expressions have linguistic, cultural or religious roots. On the other hand, greeting expressions are also used for different meanings.

The word of Salaam is a short form of “As-salaam Alaykum Wa-Rahmatullah we-barkatuh”, and this word derived from Arabic, which means “peace”. The respond of the second person is “Walaikumu-Salaam”. The word “Walaikum” is a hint to the word of Allah, which means “on”, combined with a suffix that changes the meaning into “upon you”. Pars (2018) states that the meaning of Salaam is safety, security and peaceful (Pars, 2018). This word has seemingly used in all the Islamic communities, as the beginning sentence of greeting or interpersonal communication. From the perspective of communication and cognition, the word of Salaam will use for different semantic and pragmatic meaning in conversation, and these mean, belong to the community’s culture, language accents and the purpose of communication. Tauhid (2018) quotes that Salaam is Islamic politeness and the narration of God, that means Salute of Allah upon you, and declare friendship and peace, affection and devotion (Tauhid, 2018).

The main objective of this study is to investigate the relevance semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam in Afghan cultural community, but from the perspective of syntax, the word of Salaam has the same root in the overall Islamic countries languages, because this is an Arabic word, and in every language, this word will be studied from the base of Arabic linguistics’ etymology and syntax. The semantic meaning of Salaam in greeting and interpersonal communication also will be same, because the semantics meaning of conversation is without context in literal strategy of inferential model of communication, on the other hand, the result of previous studies show that the exact meaning of Salaam is peace and safety or “upon you be peace”, and the meaning of this sentence is already decoded (Qarzawi, 2011, p. 76). The main focus of this study is the semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam, because these are the speakers’ meaning in conversation, with encode term of context. So, the pragmatics meaning is the study of how contextual factors interact with linguistic meaning in the interpretation of utterances” (Sperber & Wilson, 1996, pp. 35-37).

However, in the Afghan community, the meaning of salaam is pragmatically different than its semantic meaning, such as, without greeting communication, the

word of Salaam is used at the end of a meeting, for secret and non-secret messages. Moreover, many poets, the word of Salaam used as a code in their poems, and the used of Salaam in these places sends ideal language philosophy and ordinary language philosophy meaning, and that belong to speakers. The main aim of this study is to investigate these semantic and pragmatic meanings of Salaam on the base of relevance theory among Afghans social life in Afghanistan.

II. Research Questions

The study designed two questions to find out the semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam among Afghans daily face to face and calling communication;

1. What is the semantic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan community?
2. What is the pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community?

III. Method

This paper is a qualitative research of the semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community. The study selected the Relevance theory and Grice’s Inferential Model of communication (Sperber & Wilson, 1996, pp. 118-123), to investigate the semantic and pragmatic meanings of Salaam in 40 conversations of Afghan students in the Communication University of China in Beijing, from June 1 to June 31 in 2019. For better analysis of these 40 conversations, the Inferential Model of Communication has four strategies, such as; Direct Strategy, Indirect strategy, Literal strategy, and Non-Literal strategy. Based the procedure of these four strategies and relevance theory the study briefly describes the semantic and pragmatic meanings of Salaam in these selected conversations. Based on the inferential model, the 26 conversations of them were daily or face to face conversations, and 14 were phone call conversations. The daily conversations were arranged as to face to face interpersonal communication in their living rooms or outside, but in phone call conversations, they were talking on mobile phone, messenger or WeChat with their friends or relatives.

The Inferential models established by Jandt in 1995, Alex Koch and many authors have guided their researches by the inferential theoretical model of communication, such as, “Can negative mood improve your conversation? Affective influences on conforming to Grice’s communication norms” (Alex S, Joeph S, & Matovic, 2013), (Matovic, Alex S, & Forgas, 2014), and (Fatima, 2016)

IV. The Semantic Meaning of Salaam

Salaam is an Arabic word and that is an infinitive noun in linguistics. Many Muslim non-Arab speakers

used Arabic words in the structure of their native language. So, there are thousands of words in Pashto and Dari languages in Afghanistan which have Arabic root. From the perspective of communication and cognition, the speakers used these words for the relevance meaning of the word in daily communication. Salaam is one of these kinds of words, and the semantic mean of Salaam is peace and safety.

Chart 1 describes the semantic meaning of Salaam as an introduction word in interpersonal communication in these 40 conversations as below in the term of text;

Semantic Means	Daily-Con	Calling-Con	Total
Ordinary Meaning of Salaam to Make a peaceful Agreement for the Rest of conversation	6	9	15
Ordinary Meaning of Salaam for Making peaceful and safety.	10	8	18
Total	16	17	33
	33 (82%)		

Table 1, illustrates the semantic meaning of Salaam

Table 1 shows that the Afghan students have used the word of Salaam in their 33 from 40 daily and calling conversations. In total, the 33 times used of Salaam at the beginning of the conversation were for two purposes; 6 times in the daily conversations were used for the ordinary relevance meaning of the word, to make a peaceful agreement or promise for the rest of conversation, and 9 times in the phone call conversations were also for the same objective. The second purpose of the usage of Salaam was to make a peaceful and safe environment, at the beginning of the conversation, and they didn’t plan to stay or arrange the rest of conversation, 10 times of them were in daily conversations and 8 times of them were in phone call conversations.

From the perspective of the inferential model of communication, in all the 33 conversations, speakers used literal strategy to communicate with the hearer, also many times the speaker said the word of Salaam by using direct strategy. From the perspective of cognition, there wasn’t any misunderstanding between speakers and listeners, because, in the literal and direct strategy, the messages were used in a decoding system of communication. So, during these conversations, the listeners directly got the relevance semantic meaning of the word. Finally, in all the conversations, the semantic meaning of salaam was peace and safety.

Moreover, the pragmatic meaning of Salaam is the implicature meaning of the word in communication, table 2 describes the different implicature meaning of Salaam in the light of the inferential model of communication.

Pragmatic Meaning	Type of Content		Type of Conversation	
	Prose-Content	Verse-Content	Daily-Con	Calling-Con
Goodbye	21	0	26	14
friendly	12	0		
Message to Other				
Message for Promise	5	0		
Leaving Conversation	4	0		
Lovely Message	0	4		
Secret Message	0	3		
Total	42	7	40	
	49			

Table 2, illustrates the pragmatic meaning of Salaam

Table 2 illustrates the pragmatic meanings of Salaam in 26 daily and 14 calling conversations. The findings of this study show that the 49 times used of Salaam were for six different pragmatic meanings, which they were used in 42 prose and 7 verse content in these 40 conversations.

In 21 conversations, the speakers ended their dialogue by the word of Salaam, in these dialogues, the relevance meaning of speakers was goodbye, but they said indirectly, and the speaker used non-literal strategy to reach his purpose. So, looking at the situation of the conversation and the mood of the speaker, the listener easily understands the relevant meaning of Salaam. The second more relevant meaning of Salaam was friendly message to their other non-present friends at the end of the conversation, these 12 times used of Salaam were in prose-content and they used direct-strategy in literal content. The third used of Salaam for the non-present person was, that the speaker wanted to send a message for reminding a promise, or obligation, and they directly said “say my Salaam to Ahmad” in non-literal strategy, the relevant meaning of Salaam was also clear in these 5 interpersonal communications. During the collected primary data, 4 times dialogue in these conversations were not in normal mood. To control or end the discussion, the speaker suddenly used the word of Salaam, as a result, the students were able to control their discussion, and sometimes they left the conversation. Where in face-to-face conversations, the

relevant meanings of these 4 times Salaam in verse content were to send a lovely message to their love. The second pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the term of verse was sending the secret message via the word of Salaam. So, the students indirectly used the word of Salaam in their interpersonal communications in non-literal strategy.

To conclude the analysis of the study, in these 40 conversations, the 82 times used of Salaam were in prose and verse content. From these used, 33 times were at the start of their conversations for semantic meaning, and 49 used of Salaam were for pragmatic meanings. From the perspective of the inferential model of communication, they were used direct, indirect, literal and non-literal strategies for using the context of Salaam in their face-to-face or phone call conversations. Looking at the mood of the speaker in conversation, the listener easily understands the relevant semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam in these conversations.

V. Discussion

The findings of the study show that 82% of the conversations were started with the word of Salaam, and all these uses had two semantic means at the start of conversations. In 15 conversations the purpose of the speaker was the ordinary meaning of Salaam to make a peaceful agreement for the rest of conversation, and in 18 conversations the main objective of Salaam was the ordinary meaning of Salaam to make the peaceful and safe condition for friendly relations. From the perspective of relevance theory, the exact meaning of Salaam in all the previous credible studies is peace and safety.

As the study described in the introduction, the word of Salaam is a short form of “AsalaamAlaikumWa-RahmatullahWaBarkatuh”, and this form of Salaam uses in the greeting communication of Afghans. From the perspective of explicator, these phrases have two related meanings in greeting communication, the first is “the peace be upon you” and second is “you be safe and protected” (Tanha, 2009, p. 21). These are common meanings of Salaam which are used in direct or literal strategy in the structure of the inferential model of communication in Afghanistan, and these two meanings have the same root in the Arabic language. Pen (2010) states the different meanings of Salaam with its root that, the source of any word of Arabic origin can always be traced back to a root consisting of a three-letter format. Depending on the vowels employed, the root can produce a range of vocabulary that is closely relevant to the semantics of the root. Applying the basics above, the word Salaam is consequently derived from the root S-L-M produced Sin-Lam- Mim (Arabic

letter). The root S-L-M translates as “whole safe” (pen, 2010).

Moreover, the word of salaam and Shalom has the same meaning in Islamic and Judaic literature, KML online dictionary expressed the relation between Salaam and Shalom that they quoted: “The words Salaam and Shalom are both descended from the Semitic root also meaning peace” (Dictionary, n.d.).

From the perspective of ideal philosophy, Aban (2010) states that the word of Salaam has been quoted more than 40 times in Holy Quran (Aban, 2010). KML online dictionary further describes the religious philosophical meaning of Salaam in Holy Quran that, the use of the phrase has its roots in the Quran and Hadith “speaks of Mohammad, the prophet of Muslim”, holy books in Islam. Muslims are instructed to return greetings courteously in Surah An- Nisa: volume 86 of the Quran. In the hadith book Sahih Al-Bukhari, volume 8, book 74, number 246, Adam, newly created, greets the angels of Allah with AsalaamuAlaikum. The polite response to the phrase is “Wa-AlaikumAsalaam” which means “and upon be peace” (Dictionary, n.d.)

However, the response of the second person in Afghan greeting communication is “Alaikum Salaam” Evason (2019) describes the meaning of Salam Alaikum in Afghan greeting culture that, a common verbal greeting is “Salam Alaikum”, meaning “Peace be Upon you”. People usually put their right hand over their heart when they speak, to show respect and sincerity in the greeting (Evason, 2019). Afghans usually ask about how a person’s health; business or family is going, waiting for these initial pleasantries to finish before asking a direct question. However, people ask “How are you?” by saying “Ta Sanga yee” in Pashto, “chutoor Hasta” in Dari or “ShomaCheturHastin”. However, the result of this study shows that the semantic meaning of the word of Salaam at the beginning of these 33 conversations was peace and safety.

A. Discussion on the pragmatic meaning of Salaam

The finding of the study found six different meanings of Salaam in these 40 conversations. Goodbye, friendly message to other, sending a message for reminding promise or commitment, saying Salaam for leaving a conversation, lovely message and sending the secret message were the different pragmatic meaning of Salaam, which they used 49 times in 40 conversations. From the perspective of the inferential model of communication, the dialogue was preformatted by using direct or indirect, and literal or non-literal strategies, in prose and verse content.

These alternative meanings have used in different areas of their interpersonal communication. Moreover, the speaker’s meaning of Salaam was in the form of different linguistic styles. For instance, a poet uses the word of Salaam for sending a romantic message, and in this kind of communication, the word of Salaam use for implicature meaning, so the implicature meaning of Salaam is changeable in daily communication. Daily communication is an important part of Afghans life that while greeting for offering our best wishes to each other, people use different linguistic terms, and use the inferential model strategies in dialogue. For instance, when anyone is on the way and says “Salaam” to another, in this condition Salaam has been used with its ordinary mean, such as;

A; Salaam Alaikum

B; Alaikum Salaam

In this short greeting conversation, Salaam is used as the base of social or religious responsibility. But if the speaker says to the second person Salaam and he wants to stand, that means, the speaker will come for another meaning and following any specific objectives, and he/she will complete the rest of the conversation. Sometimes, when people finish their meeting, the person who wants to leave this meeting says:

A: AsalaamuAlaikum, have a good time!

B; Walaiku Salaam, you too.

In this conversation, the meaning of the speaker is to finish the meeting and move somewhere, or he does not want to continue the meeting or conversation. The second meaning of Salaam in this conversation is that the speaker wants to address to his friend, that I am peaceful with you.

B. Discussion on the pragmatic meaning of Salaam in mediated communications

The third aim of this kind of communication is to communicate people with each other from a long distance through medium. In this kind of communication, people used different mediums to connect such as in the above 14 conversations, and they send a verbal or written message. From the perspective of communication and cognition, there are many changeable meaning sentences in this non-face to face or mediated conversations. The pragmatic meaning in the term of implicature or explicator in the 14 calling interpersonal communications is altered. From the perspective of implicature, the meaning of Salaam is also exchangeable. In Afghanistan, when anyone sends a message to others, sometimes they used the word of Salaam for secret or non-secret meaning, for instance: I have promised with a person named Ahmad that I

would give a useable research book to learn research methodology. I didn't see him for a long time and he sent me a message:

-Ahmad: Dear Rahimi! I hope that you accept my Salaam.

Pragmatic or implicature meaning

-Ahmad wants to know that if I have found or not a research book for him.

-Ahmad wants to remind me that I have to remember his promise.

In this short conversation, the implicature meaning in this sentence is so changeable than its ordinary explicator meaning. From the perspective of the maxims of cooperative principles, the quality of the speakers' demand is also strong because the speaker may seriously need his book.

C. Discussion on the pragmatic meaning of Salaam in verse sentences

The findings of the study show that 7 times use of Salaam were in verses content. Poetry is an important part of communication, and that is a vital way of sending different secret and non-secret message. In Afghanistan, this communicated way is also common for sending a message. If we study the Afghan literature background, we will see that many Afghan kings have sent their message in the form of poems. In these poems, we should find out many messages that they have used the word of Salaam for sending messages. From the perspective of communication and cognition, there are different pragmatic meanings in the used of every word of Salaam, which is used in this kind of communication. In the ordinary language philosophy study of these messages, we have to study the context of a message, because the meaning of these messages is changeable, For instance:

زما د ليري وطن ياره

د شپې سپوږمۍ ته سلام كړه سلام به كړمه

The implicature meaning of Salaam in these folkloric poems is the message about the separation from his beloved one. In the first verse the poet says; oh, my beloved one you are staying far away from me in the other country; look at the shining moon in the night together with me and we both could say Salaam to the moon and it will deliver our Salaams to each other. So, the pragmatic meaning of Salaam in this verse content is a lovely message. However, there are numerous poems which its poets have sent their different romantic, heroic, epic, educational and other messages with the use of the word of Salaam.

VI. Conclusion

Salaam is a significant word in Afghan greeting communication, and the ordinary meaning of salaam in interpersonal communication is peace and safety. In other words, the mean of Salaam in greeting communication is "the peace and safety upon you or the mercy of God upon you", and it has the same root in all the Islamic countries' languages. But in the mind of Afghan speakers, the meaning of salaam is pragmatically different. Without greeting communication, this word is used at the body or ends of a conversation and send a secret or non-secret message. Many poets send various encoded messages by the word of Salaam in their verse content, and these messages have many ideal or ordinary language philosophies meaning.

The main aim of this study was to investigate the semantic and pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community. The study consisted of two research questions to find out what is the semantic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan community. And what is the Pragmatic meaning of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community?

The study was guided by the relevance theory and the inferential model of communication. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis method examined the 26 face to face and 14 phone call conversations of Afghan students in the Communication University of China in Beijing. The findings of the study show that the 33-time used of Salaam at the start of the conversation was for the semantic meaning of Salaam, to make an agreement for the rest of conversation, and for making peace and safety relations.

Moreover, the study concludes six pragmatics meaning of Salaam in these 40 conversations, the meaning of 21 times used of Salaam was goodbye at the end of the conversation, 12 time used of Salaam was for sending a friendly message to other by the other end speaker, the 5-time used of Salaam was for reminding a promise or commitment, and the mean of 4 times used of Salaam were to leave or finish the conversation. Based on the findings of the research, the 7-time used of Salaam in verse content was to send a lovely and secret message for making romantic or heroic relations. This paper found that there are various meanings of Salaam in the Afghan cultural community, and these findings of the research have naturally led the author to conclude that the pragmatic meaning of Salaam is in the context of the message. Because the word of Salaam was used for different purposes in several interpersonal communications.

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