CHAPTER FIVE

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Five concludes the thesis by examining the implications of the application of Speech Act Theory on the collected data. The discussion in this chapter is informed by the main investigative issue articulated in Chapter One, section 1.4.2 – the status of Speech Act Theory and pragmatics in establishing communicative competence of English second language users. The discussion also focuses on the questions below which were formulated from the main research issue:

- How does a hearer decipher the intention and meaning of an utterance?

- What does linguistic well-formedness entail? In other words, what is the difference between a meaningful string of words and a meaningless one?

- What is the status of non-standard but meaningful utterances within the concept of Speech Act Theory?

- What is the status of Speech Act Theory as an analytical tool for the establishment of communicative competence in the chosen contexts of Univen and the Venda area?

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

These questions raise issues concerning the whole notion of communication in a second language and what deductions can be arrived at from an examination of the data. The conclusions will be discussed under two main sections – the first section will review the first two questions on the nature of communication, as formulated from the main research issue, and second section will focus on the next two questions which focuses on the status of SAT in relation to the data collected.

5.2.1 NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

Perhaps one of the most complex and perplexing concepts in communication studies is the role of the hearer in linguistic interactions. Indeed, it can be argued that understanding what a hearer does during communication, still remains open to debate. Part of the problem surrounds the arbitrary nature of word meaning and the number of linguistic deductions necessary to interpret an utterance. The samples analysed in Chapter Four, in particular samples 13 and16,[20] give some indication of the background knowledge a hearer needed for the relevant interpretation to be arrived at. Contending with such a complex cognitive process it is hardly surprising that misunderstanding can frequently occur as some of the

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[20] Sample 13: The students in our group are many.
    Sample 16: I won't go there no more.

samples demonstrate, for example, samples 17 and 18[21] where only 33% and 31% of hearers, respectively, were able to correctly interpret the speakers' intentions. How a hearer processes propositions in utterances or how understanding is created has been a mystery,

In what has been hailed as one of the influential works in language philosophy, John Locke's 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding' (1689) portrays verbal communication as a form of 'telementation'[22] a concept not original to Locke as it has existed in language thinking as far back as the era of Aristotle. But what does appear to be original to Locke is his concern with the 'imperfection of words' and, by logical extension, utterances. We can never know, Locke argues, that the ideas we signify by certain words are the same for speaker and hearer, giving rise to his notion of 'intersubjectivity of understanding'. Since, under Locke's telementational view of communication, understanding is a private, mental activity, as any understanding of a word or utterance is likewise private and subjective.

The remedy to the perceived problems of the imperfection of words and intersubjectivity of understanding, according to Locke, would be if 'speakers clearly defined all complex ideas in terms of the simple ideas of which they are composed' (McGregor, 1986: 92). How the defining of the initial simple ideas can be undertaken is not clearly demonstrated in his writings and really not of

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[21] Sample 17: Leave me do it for you.
   Sample 18: I feel hopeless for this week.

relevance to this study. Of interest to this study is Locke's point of the subjectivity of meaning and hence of understanding. If this notion is carried even further, then the role of the hearer is not as passive as it is made out to be in the discussion so far. In fact, the burden of successful communication, then, is equally shared by hearer and speaker. Just as it is the responsibility of the hearer to integrate all linguistic and non-linguistic clues to arrive at a logical and acceptable interpretation, it is also the responsibility of the speaker to ensure that such clues are available and that any 'imperfections' are eliminated from his or her utterances. Yet in ordinary interactions it is speakers who have the luxury of complaining that they have been misunderstood, and, in fact, when they have to rephrase an utterance, the assumption is often that they are doing the hearer a favour.

With the samples analysed, one can say with a fair amount of certainty that misunderstanding has mainly occurred because of the surface structure of the samples and not from the imperfection of words or the intersubjectvity of understanding. However, if the samples were structurally and pragmatically unblemished but were still misunderstood, then the question which could be asked would be similar to the one this section is attempting to answer, that is, 'How does a hearer decipher the intention and meaning of an utterance?' Or, how does one make explicit (provide outward criteria) for an implicit (mental) act? One such obvious criterion is hearers' resultant linguistic and non-linguistic action, but that is all well and good if the understanding of a linguistic interaction

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[22] The transmission of thoughts from the mind of the speaker to that of the hearer (Locke, 1689).

can appropriately be evidenced in such manner. Where such behaviour is not appropriate then evidence of understanding would have to be demonstrated in an alternative way.

The second question asked, 'What does linguistic well-formedness entail or what is the difference between a meaningful string of words and a meaningless one?' can be discussed along a similar line. 'Meaningful' is a word capable of 'inter-subjectivity of understanding'. A word, or an utterance can be declared meaningful or meaningless linguistically as shown in Chapter Two. Creation and miscreation of meaning is possible syntactically, semantically and pragmatically. Highly structured restrictions ensure that utterances are syntactically and semantically meaningful; however, the same cannot be said for the creation of pragmatic meaningfulness. Pragmatic well-formedness, as demonstrated by the samples given in Table 4.1 of this study, seems to rest on a variety of circumstances, among them, shared linguistic culture (samples 4 and 15[23]), physical setting of the utterance (samples 2 and 9[24]), relationship between the interlocutors (samples 6 and 17[25]), implications (sample 10[26]) and the notion of indirect speech acts (samples 4 and 13)[27]. The aspect of inter-subjectivity is

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[23] Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
   Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
[24] Sample 2: Sorry, I can pass. (With a rising intonation on the word 'pass')
   Sample 9: I am in need of a pamphlet.
[25] Sample 6: Lecturer: Were you in class today? Student: Of course. (Please describe the second utterance)
   Sample 17: Leave me do it for you.
[26] Sample 10: A: Did you enjoy the film? B: Too much! (Please describe the second utterance).
[27] Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
   Sample 13: The students in our discussion group are many.

illustrated more vividly, therefore, when an analysis factors in pragmatic considerations, as shown by these samples.

Perhaps a relevant discussion at this stage should focus on the role that form and function play in meaning creation. All approaches to discourse, at one time or another, has to pay attention to either the form or function of an utterance. The impression should not be created that paying attention to form, as this analysis has done, implies meaning, particularly within and an ESL cultural environment, such as the context of these samples, has not been accommodated. Meaning is not possible with a 'formless' utterance. In fact a string of words cannot be designated an 'utterance' unless it has some form recognisable to the users.

Doing a formalist-structural analysis, in addition to the more pragmatic review, as done in this investigation, is not a negation of the socio-cultural stance advocated in the earlier parts of this study. Neither is it an abandonment of the earlier assertions that language is first and foremost a societal tool. In fact the opposite picture is true. If the rationale behind a formalist evaluation is an acknowledgement of the supremacy of structural codes over meaning, then this investigation should not have even started. I say so because, it was declared right at the beginning that these utterances have structural flaws of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic nature, then the assumption would be that these utterances should be incapable of creating meaning. However, I went on to analyse these samples to prove that despite these flaws the majority of the

utterances created meaning. A clear indication that I do not believe structural codes are the only yardstick for the evaluation of communicative competence but rather other considerations, which by logical deduction are socio-cultural, must account for the interlocutors' ability to communicate. The argument here is that, because the interlocutors share a code or repertoire of interpretation which may be different to outsiders this has enabled communication to take place. Indeed, studies have shown that in South Africa, black students learn ESL in formal contexts (hence the stilted constructions of some of the utterances) and from teachers who are not L1 speakers of English. Others have argued that striving for L1 norms in an L2 situation is difficult, if not impossible.

Secondly in pointing out that in the majority of the utterances, 56%, pragmatic considerations assisted the meaning-creating process is an indication of the non-abandonment of socio-cultural involvement in meaning creation. Part of what this investigation aimed to do was to downplay the importance of mentalist language attributes while demonstrating that in the majority of ESL utterances socio-pragmatic considerations have to be factored into the equation. For example, in the above discussion on the pragmatic well-formedness of the samples, I have listed, quite comprehensively, the non-structural factors influencing the interpretation of some utterances. I have identified factors, such as shared linguistic culture, physical setting of the utterances, relationship between interlocutors, implication and the notion of indirect speech acts, all of which are in line with the context of situation as discussed by Malinowski (1923).

Whether a researcher belongs to either the formalist or the functionalist school of thought, the creation of meaning necessitates two or more individuals exchanging messages and this is what is termed 'communication'. One therefore talks of 'non-transmission' of such messages and when that happens, one can say that communication or the interpretation of the speaker's intention has not occurred. Variety of reasons can be offered to explain this, one could be that the codes were too foreign and hence failed to capture the intentions of the speaker or that the manner of meaning-creation among the interlocutors is different, therefore they could not create meaning, uniformly. These results demonstrate that, with these samples it is a combination of these factors. This is in line with the aim running through this investigation; that communicative competence is a multi-faceted attribute. These results show that knowledge of grammar (as outlined in first language domain and may be represented by Quirk *et al* [1985]), is not more important than such socio-cultural characteristics, as the place of the utterance, whether it was in a formal or non-formal setting or whether the interlocutors were first or second language speakers.

One cannot, in all honesty, champion a cause that totally ignores values of semiotic codes ascribed to it by the custodians of such codes on the argument that such codes infringe on other users particular linguistic style, in their own language. Would it not be better for such users to restrict their linguistic activities to a language where the cultural and structural codes can be syncronised? Of

course that is point worthy of a whole research project and cannot be answered by this report, but it is a point worth pondering over.

5.2.2   THE LIMITATIONS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

The uncertainty and hesitation in assigning illocutionary acts (function) to some of these samples is in accord with one of the criticisms levelled against the theory, that it is difficult to assign one intention to one utterance or the 'one-sentence/one-case principle'. In other words, it is not always possible to find a match between the form and function, therefore an interrogative utterance does not always seek information; an imperative does not only command an action, neither does a statement only offer information. As sample 17[28] illustrates, an imperative can be interpreted as an offer or as a suggestion, and the participants would integrate the linguistic codes with a comprehensive context to identify the appropriate act. A similar point is made by Halliday and Hasan (1989) when they observe that language is multi-functional, a point demonstrated by some of the samples: 4, 6, and 10[29], for example. All of these utterances are statements of a proposition as well as complaint, complaint, invitation respectively. The notion of multi-functionality   does not imply that one can isolate a certain portion of the sentence as indicating one function and another part as the other function, rather the meanings are interwoven. To understand the meanings, each utterance

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[28] Sample 17 Leave me do it for you.
[29] Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
   Sample 6: Lecturer: Were you in class today? Student: Of course. (Pease describe the second utterance).
   Sample 10: A: Did you enjoy the film? B: Too much! (Please describe the second utterance).

needs to be examined from different angles, each perspective contributing towards the whole interpretation. This notion has implications for the classification of speech acts as it questions the necessity of having such distinct categories or asks whether more flexible groupings or acts classified on some kind of continuum might not better reflect what actually happens with language.

The unease in attempting a one-utterance/one-function classification, it seems, can be reduced only by the provision of extremely comprehensive, linguistic and non-linguistic situational details. For example, for the interpretation of utterance 16[30] in the previous chapter, very many autobiographical facts had to be included in the processing of the internal structure of the utterance, by the hearer. A tension arises as to the amount of influence that either the structural codes or the context clues play in the eventual interpretation. Although pragmatic thinking would have us believe that both factors play an equal role, that way of reasoning is acceptable where the utterance is syntactically acceptable and hence can be said to have equal 'status' with the situation details. However, in an instance where the syntactic blemishes are so intrusive, for example, sample 18[31] that one is forced to rely very heavily on the situation details for interpretation, there would be an impact on an evaluation of the communicative competence of the speaker. The analysis of that utterance shows that it was correctly interpreted as a statement and a complaint, but one cannot really say that the speaker of such an utterance is competent, even if the hearer has correctly interpreted the utterance.

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[30] Sample 16: I won't go there no more.
[31] Sample 18: I feel hopeless for this week.

This opens a debate as to the role of syntax and context in interpretation, communication and communicative competence. If there is no role awarded to syntactic accuracy then the implication is that context details are paramount in communication and syntax plays 'second fiddle' or vice versa. The debate questions the fundamental principles of the notions of linguistic competence and communicative competence as articulated by Chomsky (1965) and Hymes (1967). (See Chapter Two).

On the basis of Chomsky's (1965:4) distinction between 'grammatical competence' and 'pragmatic competence', the speakers of the samples used in this study may be classified as 'pragmatically competent' in English, for 56% of the utterances were correctly interpreted. Although considered pragmatically knowledgeable, it is no guarantee that their grammatical competence is also at the same level, for, according to Chomsky, performance competence does not directly reflect grammatical competence as 'a record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course and so on' (1965: 3). Chomsky, as noted earlier, believes that language use is only one indication of language proficiency, hence it is quite difficult to assign language proficiency only on pragmatic knowledge. This is a point not stressed by Hymes who rather maintains that use should be the main criterion for establishing communicative competence.

A relevant issue at this stage would be to determine the quality of the role that linguistic knowledge (knowledge of grammar) and pragmatic knowledge have played in achieving communication with these utterances. If grammar has played the major role then one can talk of the superior role of syntax in communication or vice versa. One should also be able to talk empirically of 'grammatical competence' as distinct from 'pragmatic competence' (awareness of appropriateness of situations). But we know that pragmatic competence is not possible without syntactic competence; as Chomsky in Botha (1987: 102) notes, '(grammar) competence is presupposed by every instance of (pragmatic) performance'. Therefore, what these utterances demonstrate is that the interlocutors in this investigation do have some grammatical and pragmatic competencies as they have managed to communicate successfully in some instances. Also deducible from the analysis is the fact that, relatively, a lesser role is played by syntactic accuracy in informal communication than in written communication in these samples. Chomsky, in Botha (1987: 85), argues the point differently. He talks of the conceptual system of language as 'more primitive' and therefore inferior to the computational system[32]. The conceptual system 'permits us to perceive, and to categorise, and symbolize, maybe to even reason in an elementary way'. Argued in this way communication, which is part of the pragmatic and conceptual systems, is primitive as compared to the more sophisticated mental features of the computational system. Chomsky *(ibid.)* even notes:

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[32] Chomsky equates the computational system with grammatical competence.

One might speculate that higher apes, which apparently lack the capacity to develop even the rudiments of the computational structures of human language, nevertheless may command parts of the conceptual structure just discussed and may thus be capable of elementary forms of symbolic function or symbolic communication while entirely lacking the human language faculty.

Although Chomsky is not equating the mental challenges of human communication with those of the other primates, he does imply that communication is a lesser mental operation a fact which the concept of communicative competence rejects.

This fact also explains part of linguists' unhappiness with the lack of observable sustainable theories in pragmatics and its difficulty in sustaining its status as a separate branch of language study (see Chapter Three). So, although SAT is usually not employed in the debate between 'competence' (grammar) and 'performance' (linguistic events) it indirectly contributes to the discussion when its tenets are applied in discourse analysis and as an evaluator of communicative competence.

Another point also worth noting hinges on the fact that in the domain of SAT, meaning is created if the hearer's interpretation matches the speaker's intention; and when meaning is created, communication is assumed to have been achieved. However, in samples 14, 15 and 16[33] (16%) although hearer

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[33] Sample 14: Lecturer: I would like to speak to Kate: Student: No, she is not around (Please describe the second utterance)

interpretation matched speaker intention, communication did not occur, while in samples 2 and 5[34] (11%) although there were mismatches between speaker intention and hearer interpretation communication did occur. The pertinent question is what this means for SAT. SAT does not seem to have a satisfactory rebuttal for the point that other variables, apart from structural codes and context, contribute to communication. This is because most of the utterances which the Speech Act theorists have exploited in discussing their assertions have been devoid of blemishes, hence making no provision for meaning-bearing blemished utterances like those examined by this study. The English language is now an international commodity spoken as non-mother tongue by more nations than those who speak it as their mother tongue. A web site, <http://englishenglish.com> (3 June, 2004) states that more than a billion people are learning English, of these 375 million speak it as a second language, while 750 million speak it as a foreign language. SAT will have to accommodate the fact that there are a vast number of English second language speakers, if the theory is to remain relevant in the current linguistic picture.

The use of SAT's as a discourse evaluator is also in question because of the similarity of the conditions for the different speech functions. For example, according to Searle (1969: 66-67), the differences between a request, an offer and a command rest on the fact that with commands there is some urgency and the speaker has a higher status than the hearer. A suggestion can be expressed

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Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
Sample 16: I won't go there no more.

using literally all forms of sentence structures and all the speech acts can be expressed by the declarative forms of utterances. This point, coupled with the notion that the meaning of an utterance rests with the speaker, reduces the objectivity of SAT which, in turn, adversely affects its value as a scientific evaluative tool.

 SAT also has limited value and accuracy with written utterances, as the analysis demonstrated. If SAT is needed to make definite statements about the communicative competence of a speaker, then the exercise should be limited to spoken utterances; or if written utterances are used, they must be triangulated with another evaluative tool. This is because written utterances, with sketchy context details, stand a greater danger of being ambiguous or misunderstood.

The role of context in utterance interpretation is an obvious one for, as Corder (1981:39) has pointed out, almost all sentences are either ambiguous or difficult to comprehend when taken out of context. However, instances of sentences being genuinely ambiguous in context are rather rare if the deep structure is also taken into account. For second language speakers, where the deep structure of an utterance is not so obvious, owing to limited grammatical insight, misinterpretation is a real danger.

This last point highlights the question of the volume of situational detail needed to eliminate the problem of miscommunication. It was clear that some of the

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[34] Sample 2: Sorry, I can pass. (With a rising intonation on the word, 'pass').

respondents did not realise the significance of the context in utterance meaning and interpreted only the structural codes, thereby coming up with inexplicable responses. Such a problem would be minimised if the hearers were responding to spoken utterances. For example, it is quite difficult to miss the rising intonation in spoken interrogatives, hence respondents would have had no problem with sample 3.[35] That is because prosodic features and other non-verbal features are extremely difficult to capture when setting in a written context.

The above discussion has outlined some of the shortcomings of SAT as an utterance and communicative competence evaluator. This may cause one to believe that, that undermines the validity of SAT. Not at all. It has been acknowledged in the initial pages of this report that using SAT in an evaluative mode for ESL utterances is a pioneer move. One can, of course, use some of the more tried evaluation tools, such as functional grammar or the social-semiotic approach of Hymes, but the intention of this project, as frequently mentioned, is examining the realisation of speech act or functions, and the most appropriate strategy for this is SAT.

5.2.3 RESPONDENTS

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from some of the responses in Chapter Four is the respondents' inability to differentiate among the speech functions offered on the questionnaire. For example, it is quite difficult to find justification

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[35] Sample 3: She gave what.

for the respondents interpreting samples 2 and 9[36] as commands or the majority of respondents being 'not sure' about utterance 3.[37] Such unjustifiable responses forces one to the conclusion that some respondents were reacting solely to the linguistic codes without recourse to the contextual details given, although it could also point to the level of competence (in a Chomskian sense).

5.2.4 SAMPLES

An analysis of this nature has the tendency to develop into establishing a balance between the grammatical and pragmatic explanation of the features of the utterances. Caution has to be exercised so that the research does not read like a social justification for features observed with the utterances. For, naturally, standard utterances and those which successfully communicated the speakers' intention did not merit as extensive a discussion as those in which communication faltered. Those with idiosyncratic characteristics of one kind or another have been more extensively examined. Difficulties arose in gauging the degree of 'delicacy' that can be undertaken with the samples at both pragmatic and structural levels. An important precaution has been that this analysis should not degenerate into a solely grammatical analysis or a free-for-all subjective pragmatic justification of these samples. Finding a balance has not been easy. Maybe highly structured evaluation criteria would have alleviated the dilemma, although too rigid a criterion would thwart reaction to some of the highly individualised utterances. In these samples, attempts have been made to identify

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[36] Sample 2: Sorry, I can pass. (With rising intonation on the word 'pass').
   Sample 9: I am in need of a pamphlet.

the features most obstructive to the transmission of that message, and the analysis has continued by demonstrating how the miscommunication occurred. The identified source of the mismatch plus the explanations are, of course, open to debate.

The analysis also provides a picture of the number of variables, linguistic and otherwise, involved in the creation of meaning. For example, interpretation of utterances 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 15 and 18[38] involves familiarity with Univen tertiary norms, while matching samples 1 and 5[39] correctly with their functions requires a knowledge of Tshivenda and the cultural norms of the interlocutors. A fair amount of the interpretation of these utterances is therefore dependent on the respondents' membership of the Univen linguistic 'in-group'.

As indicated earlier, the samples were collected from one group of students (1997 ELP students) and were responded to by another group (English major students of 2002). Because the only variables were the years and the courses these students were pursuing, one would have assumed that the commonality among the speakers and the hearers would have ensured a greater percentage

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[37] Sample 3: She gave what.
[38] Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
  Sample 6: Lecturer: Were you in class today? Student: Of course.
  Sample 7: Student A: I had an accident last week. Student B: Sorry. Are you all right? Student A: I am fine, but it is so boring. (Please describe the third utterance).
  Sample 9: I am in need of a pamphlet.
  Sample 10: Student A: Did you enjoy the film? Student B: Too much! (Please describe the second utterance)
  Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
  Sample 18: I feel hopeless for this week.
[39] Sample 1: I am asking for a pen to fill out this form.
  Sample 5: I am asking to be apologized due to my failure to submit my assignment.

of respondents correctly matching the listed speech acts with speaker intention. However, achieving only 56% success in this regard, and with such a large number of respondents selecting 'not sure' for several utterances raises some questions. One wonders whether the difficulty lies either with the selection of samples or with the respondents' lack of knowledge of the precise nature of the speech acts or too much variety in the offered speech acts on the questionnaire or a lack of variety of offered speech acts.

An analysis of this kind is also indicative of the sameness of the discourse analyses strategies which fall under the umbrella of 'cross-cultural analysis'. Malcolm Coulthard (1977) and Deborah Schiffrin (1994) have detailed the diverse strategies possible in analysing discourse within and outside a pragmatic framework quite extensively. Although both writers admit that discourse analyses strategies fall within two main paradigms – structural and functional – they do go on to differentiate strategies within these main paradigms. The contention of the study is that the dissimilarities among some of the functional analyses, ethnographic, conversational and pragmatic, are not so obvious with an analysis of the kind undertaken in this study. The theoretical orientations of these strategies may diverge, but their applications to utterances are not so dissimilar. In other words, areas such as the procedures, the assumptions running through the exercise, the nature of the end results and their evaluative significance are comparable in the various discourse evaluation methods.

The conclusions from the sample analysis of Chapter Four are reported at two levels in the following sections; level one, structural or grammatical and level two, pragmatic, depending on the identified main source of the miscommunication within the samples. These two levels of processing overlap in many instances, and part of the hypothesis of this study is an acknowledgement of this fact. Indeed, research into information processing suggests that although one can talk, theoretically, of pragmatic failure or grammatical error, these different levels of processing are carried on simultaneously, constantly feeding into each other and reinforcing each other. But separating the levels in this artificial manner allows one to be more specific in the explanations.

5.2.1.1   GRAMMATICAL CONCLUSIONS

It is legitimate, in my view, to speak of grammatical error, since grammaticality can be judged according to prescriptive rules. In the samples used for this investigation, 14 utterances (78%) (samples 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17 and 18)[40] had some grammatical errors. Out of these, 5 utterances (28%) (3,

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[40] Sample 1: I am asking for a pen to fill out this form.
   Sample 2: Sorry, I can pass.
   Sample 3: She gave what.
   Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
   Sample 5: I am asking to be apologized due to my failure to submit my assignment.
   Sample 7: Student A: I had an accident last week. Student B: Sorry. Are you all right? Student A: I am
    fine, but it is so boring. (Please describe the third utterance)
   Sample 8: The lecturer said I was late but I denied.
   Sample 10: Speaker A: Did you enjoy the film? Speaker B: Too much! (Please describe the second utterance)
   Sample 11: I was left lonely in the class.
   Sample 12: The broken plough, it is fixed.
   Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
   Sample 16: I won't go there no more.
   Sample 17: Leave me do it for you.
   Sample 18: I feel hopeless for this week.

7, 8, 15 and 16[41]) were misinterpreted by the respondents. The conclusion therefore is that grammatical errors are not as far reaching as other types of error. That may explain why writers like Thomas (1995: 94) refer to them as 'lower-level' errors. This is not in any way to underestimate the amount of impediment that such errors can place on the interpretation process. Grammatical errors may be irritating, and in most cases temporarily impede communication, but as a rule, they are apparent in the surface structure, so that the hearer is aware that an error has occurred, a fact which is illustrated in the samples. For example, part of the blemish of sample 1[42] is not treating the verb 'to ask' as stative; in sample 2[43] the blemish is the unusual word order and non-recognition of the rising intonation or an inappropriate form of a question; in sample 4[44] the blemish is semantic laziness; in sample 7[45] it is the seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of ideas in student A's second response; in sample 8[46] the use of the wrong word, and so on. These errors therefore involved either single lexical items or whole structures. In spite of these glaring malformations, respondents managed to correctly interpret most of these utterances because meaning is also dependent on socio-cultural issues.

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[41] Sample 3: She gave what.
Sample 7: Student A: I had an accident last week. Student B: Sorry. Are you all right? Student A: I am fine, but it is so boring. (Please describe the third utterance)
Sample 8: The lecturer said I was late but I denied.
Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
Sample 16: I won't go there no more.
[42] Sample 1: I am asking for a pen to fill out this form.
[43] Sample 2: Sorry, I can pass.
[44] Sample 4: My marks are somehow.
[45] Sample 7: Student A: I had an accident last week. Student B: Sorry. Are you alright? Student A: I am fine, but it is so boring.(Please describe the third utterance)
[46] Sample 8: The lecturer said I was late but I denied.

What has happened in most of these grammatically blemished utterances is that hearers, once alerted to the fact that the speaker is not a native speaker of the language, seem to have little difficulty in making allowances for the imperfections in the utterances. A similar process, I believe, happens in the outside world. Out of the 18 utterances analysed, 13 contained grammatical errors but despite that, communication was achieved in 9 instances, that is, 70% of grammatically inaccurate utterances were successfully interpreted. Meaning creation, it seems, is considerably shortened for the hearer, by the knowledge that the speaker is abiding by usual conversation principles, hence the hearer can immediately eliminate certain options as likely interpretations.

While grammatical errors may reveal a speaker to be a less-than-proficient language user, pragmatic failure is not so indulgently regarded.

5.2.2.1 PRAGMATIC CONCLUSIONS

Whereas it is possible to talk of grammatical errors, with pragmatic competence it is not as straightforward since pragmatic principles are more normative than prescriptive. The nature of pragmatic ambivalence is such that it is not possible to say the pragmatic force of an utterance is 'wrong'. All one can say is that it failed to achieve the speaker's intention or that the hearer could not interpret the pragmatic force. While a grammatical error puts one outside the grammatical system of the language, one can flout pragmatic principles and still remain in the

pragmatic system of the language, although maybe as an impolite, aggressive or an unappreciative member of the system. Sophisticated users of a language deliberately flout or break pragmatic conventions with impunity and great effect, once the interlocutors have established each other's linguistic statuses.

The analysis has shown that of the four utterances which contained pragmatic blemishes (6, 9, 14 and 17)[47] only two, (50%) successfully communicated the speakers' intentions. Sample15[48], which contained both syntactic and pragmatic blemishes, was also unsuccessful in communicating the speakers' intentions. In addition to the lack of success in interpreting samples 6 and 14[49], these utterances are also capable of generating some offence and irritation in the hearer. Likewise sample 17[50] may create some annoyance or irritation if taken as a command and not as a suggestion or an offer. The conclusion is that pragmatic blemishes are more capable, relatively, of causing miscommunication than grammatical inaccuracies.

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[47] Sample 6: Lecturer: Were you in class today? Student: Of course.
Sample 9: I am in need of a pamphlet.
Sample 14: Lecturer: I would like to speak to Kate. Student: No, she is not around. (Please describe the second utterance).
Sample 17: Leave me do it for you.
[48] Sample 15: He is a popular somebody.
[49] Sample 6: Lecturer: Where you in class today? Student: Of course. (Please describe the second utterance)
Sample 14: Lecturer: I would like to speak to Kate. Student: No, she is not around. (Please describe the second utterance.

5.3   SUMMARY

In this chapter, the conclusion reached is that within certain contexts (in this case, on Univen Campus) grammatical errors are, relatively speaking, less obstructive in the communication process, although such blemishes may categorise the speaker as not fully proficient in the English language. It is further concluded that grammatical errors affect the 'outward appearance' or the surface structure of the utterance but that hearers, once alerted to the fact that the speaker is less than proficient in the language, penetrate the deep structure of the utterance to decipher the intended meaning. The willingness of the hearer to lengthen the meaning creation by this extra level of processing is an indication that hearers are accommodating towards speakers of such calibre, a fact which facilitates communication. Pragmatic failures, however, have more potential to result in miscommunication, in addition to generating emotions such as irritation, annoyance and ill-will between the hearer and the speaker of different cultural background.

Ultimately the question is whether the respondents in the study are able to meaningful communicate, however 'blemished' the form might appear to an L1 speaker. The thesis proves this to be the case. A conclusion may be reached that some of the structural forms contained in these utterances might prove difficult for English first language speakers to understand and interpret, although

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[50] Sample 17: Leave me do it for you.

not for ESL who share a linguistic repertoire and history, and why this might be so.

Such conclusions are in line with the hypothesis which contends that blemishes in utterance construction, from whatever source, do not always result in a violation of the intended meaning and the function of the utterance, particularly when such blemishes occur within a specific or confined context such as that within which this research was conducted.