

PRAGMATICS: AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION TO PRAGMATICS
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Index Card Information

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What is pragmatics?

Semantics

- the study of truth-conditional meaning
 - the conditions under which a proposition is true
 - ‘literal’/‘context-independent’ meaning

What is pragmatics?

Pragmatics

- the study of **non-truth-conditional** aspects of utterance meaning
 - the effects of **CONTEXT** (linguistic and non-linguistic) on utterance generation and interpretation

= meaning that arises through the **USE** of language

What is pragmatics?

Context

- includes not only time/place of utterance, but also:
 - the identity of the speaker (S) and hearer (H)
 - their respective points of view, i.e. S's beliefs, S's beliefs about H, S's beliefs about H's beliefs about S, *ad infinitum*, and the same for H's beliefs
 - their (assumed) common ground/shared knowledge
 - their goals and intentions (within Dumptian limits)

What is pragmatics?

Much pragmatic meaning is indeterminate.

J: I really hate my job.

M: I'll see what I can do.

What did J convey beyond the literal meaning of her utterance? In part, it's up to her (but only in part). So, can we just ask her?

What is pragmatics?

Part of our pragmatic knowledge – or pragmatic competence – includes the knowledge of how to use (i.e. produce **and** interpret) grammatical, meaningful sentences context-appropriately.

= knowledge of language use.

What is pragmatics?

Questions to keep in mind

- Is this competence language-specific, or is it derivable from more general (universal) properties of human/rational behavior? [key example]
- Is a particular meaning semantic or pragmatic? (Phenomena do not come labeled as one or the other.)
- Is this competence autonomous with respect to semantics? (the conveyor belt approach)

What is pragmatics?

The autonomy of pragmatic meaning

- Reference (deixis/anaphora)
 - *I am here now.*
 - *We tried to buy the text, but they were out of them.*
- Implicature
 - *It is better to meet the love of your life and get married than get married and meet the love of your life.*
 - *I have \$4.37 on me. vs. I have \$100 on me.*

What is pragmatics?

For Levinson (1983), pragmatics is:

“the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticized, or encoded in the structure of the language”, i.e. *those conventional aspects of non-literal meaning*.

What is pragmatics?

Some examples of pragmatic phenomena

- Metaphor

He's a weed in our flower bed.

- Sarcasm

Some friend you are.

- Litotes/understatement

Gold medal gymnast: *I did ok.*

What is pragmatics?

- Indirectness

Got a quarter?

Can you pass the salt?

- Tautology

If I lose, I lose.

- Contradiction

[ad for cough drop] *It's gone, but it isn't.*

What is pragmatics?

- Relevance

What do you do? (walk, talk)

[cocktail party vs. job counselor]

What are you doing? (breathing)

Any questions? (tennis balls)

Topics to be covered

Implicature

John has one arm.

Some of you passed the midterm.

Mary picked up a hammer and broke the statue.

That cake you're eating sure looks delicious!

Do you want to see a movie tonight?

Topics to be covered

Presupposition

John realizes he failed the final.

(vs. John thinks he failed the final.)

Vicky assassinated her neighbor.

John accused me of hooking up last night.

Have you stopped beating your spouse?

Topics to be covered

Speech Acts

I bet you \$5 it snows today.

Just try to come home after midnight.

What am I, stupid?

This meeting is over.

Class dismissed. [Not!]

I hope you can see your way clear to letting this go.

[Trump to Comey]

Topics to be covered

Reference

Trump

the Donald

the president

Mogul

that man

President Trump

my upstairs neighbor

I/you/he

my husband

the 45th president of the US

the lying cheeto

Topics to be covered

How you refer to something/someone depends on what (you assume) your hearer knows/is attending to at the time of the utterance.

I was on the bus yesterday and we got in an accident because...

...the driver was drunk.

...a driver was drunk.

[on phone] Excuse me for a sec, but my #raccoon/dog wants out.

Topics to be covered

A: I just talked to my friend Bill.

B: From New Jersey?

A: Wow, what a memory!

vs.

A: I just talked to my friend Bill.

B: Who?

A: Don't you remember? The one from New Jersey?

Topics to be covered

Information Structure

That guy didn't understand the second half at all.

It's the second half that guy didn't understand at all.

What that guy didn't understand at all was the second half.

The second half, that guy didn't understand it at all.

The second half that guy didn't understand at all.

He didn't understand the second half at all, that guy.

The second half wasn't understood by that guy at all.

....

What is pragmatics?

Many choices regarding linguistic form are made on the basis of S's assumptions about H's knowledge and attention states with respect to a given context.

A sentence grammar contains no mention of context, or speakers and hearers.

What is pragmatics?

The pragmatic model of language is different.

It requires a notion of **speaker** and **hearer**, and of the **context** of speaking and hearing. Therefore the basic units of analysis are different. For syntax and semantics, the focus is on the structure and meaning of individual sentences.

What is pragmatics?

A sentence is:

- what conveys meaning.
- what expresses a proposition.
- what can be grammatical or ungrammatical (*).
- what can be meaningful or anomalous (?).

What is pragmatics?

For pragmatics, the **utterance** is basic. An utterance is a sentence uttered by a particular speaker to a particular hearer at a particular time in a particular place for a particular purpose. It need not be oral.

An utterance can be pragmatically **felicitous** or **infelicitous** (#), while a sentence can be syntactically grammatical or not (*). (n.b. we can't rely solely on our intuitions to distinguish between them!)