

Pragmatics

- Pragmatics is the study of language USE in CONTEXT.
- The HEARER uses the context to try to infer the SPEAKER'S INTENDED MEANING.
- The intended meaning is more than the SEMANTIC MEANING of the words and sentences.

Conversation is Collaborative

- Conversation is COLLABORATIVE; both participants try to minimize the work required from either of them to attain communication.
- Example
 - A: “You know that big statue down on Main Street?”
 - B: “The one at the corner of Elm?”
 - A: “Yeah...”

Mutual Knowledge

- Part of this collaboration involves making inferences and assumptions about what information is already known to both the speaker and the hearer.
- For me to refer to “the Sears Tower” I have to assume a certain amount of MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE.

Mutual Knowledge Paradox

- Theoretically the mutual knowledge required for communication is infinite.
- For me to refer to “the dog,” I must assume you know which dog I’m talking about AND that you know that I know that you know which dog I’m talking about (because if you thought I might not, then we aren’t communicating).
- One solution is to say that there are sources of CO-PRESENCE that give you evidence for mutual knowledge.

Sources of Mutual Knowledge

- Community membership: If we're both from Chicago, we can assume mutual knowledge of the Sears Tower.
- Physical copresence: If we saw a movie together, we can assume mutual knowledge of the plot, characters, etc.
- Linguistic copresence: If I've told you about a movie I saw, I can assume mutual knowledge of the things I've told you about it.

Sources of Mutual Knowledge (2)

- Indirect copresence: Inferences made from other mutual knowledge: If you and I saw the Sears Tower together (physical copresence) and you assume via community membership that I know that it's the tallest building in the country, you may infer that it's mutual knowledge that we saw the tallest building in the country.

Inferences and Intentions

- Conversation is collaborative.
- This collaboration involves inferences.
- One kind of inferences is about mutual knowledge.
- Another kind is about intentions, i.e. my inferences about your intentions.

Speaker's Mental Model of the Hearer

- As we communicate, I build up not only a mental model of what we're talking about, but also a mental model of YOUR mental world.
- My model of what you know is part of the CONTEXT of our interaction, and helps me to draw further inferences regarding your intended meaning.

Sentence vs. Utterance

- Two kinds of meaning
 - Semantic meaning—literal meaning of a sentence
 - Pragmatic meaning—meaning in context
- Sentence vs. utterance
 - Sentence is context-independent
 - Utterance is sentence in context

Some Questions

- How many semantic meanings can a sentence have?
- How many pragmatic meanings?
- How many semantic meanings can an utterance have?
- How many pragmatic meanings?
- How many meanings (and what kind) does “Can you pass the salt” have?

Speech Acts

- Every time you speak, you perform an act.
 - E.g., describe something, ask for something, greet somebody, make a request, make a promise.
- Actions carried out through language are called SPEECH ACTS.
- J. L. Austin

Form vs. Intention

- Three main kinds of speech acts
 - Assert/state
 - Ask
 - Request/command/order
- Three main syntactic forms
 - Declarative
 - Interrogative
 - Imperative

Direct vs. Indirect Speech Acts

- Direct speech act—form and intention match
- Indirect speech act—form and intention don't match
- How many kinds of direct speech act are there?
- How many kinds of indirect speech act are there?

Indirect Speech Acts with Declarative Form

- “I’d like to know the time.”
- “I’m cold.”
- What are the intentions expressed here?

Indirect Speech Acts with Interrogative Form

- “Isn’t he the biggest jerk you’ve ever met?”
- “Did you know that ...”
- “Are you really planning to wear THAT?”
- “Can you pass the salt?”
- What intentions are expressed here?
- Indirect speech acts are DEFEASIBLE.

Indirect Speech Acts with Imperative Form

- “Tell me how many brothers you have.”
- “Remember that ...”
- What kind of intention is the speaker expressing here?

Three Sources of Information for Inferences

- Grice's Cooperative Principle
- Scripts and frames
- Presuppositions

Inference and Implicature

- “Dick Cheney has one leg.”
 - Where did you get the idea (how did you infer) that he had another one too?
- When part of the speaker's meaning is not included in the semantic meaning of what is said, but is rather suggested in some other way, we say the speaker has IMPLICATED it, and the hearer has INFERRED it.
- These implicatures are called CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES, because they depend on the conversational context.

Grice's Cooperative Principle

- H. P. Grice
- “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.”
- Four maxims
 - Quantity
 - Quality
 - Relation
 - Manner

Using the Cooperative Principle

- It is only because the participants are trying to be cooperative (i.e., making their contribution appropriate to the conversation at hand) that the hearer stands a chance of accurately interpreting the speaker's utterance.
- Implicatures arise from the hearer's attempts to interpret the speaker's utterances as conforming to the Cooperative Principle.

Generating Implicatures

- You can generate implicatures either by obeying the maxims, or by flouting them.
- FLOUTING a maxim is to violate it so blatantly that the hearer can't help but realize that it's been purposely violated, forcing him or her to try to figure out why you've done so—all under the assumption that you're trying to be cooperative
- Example: penmanship example
- Example: Is the Pope Catholic?

Maxim of Quantity

- “Give as much information as is necessary, but no more than is necessary.”
- (obeying) “I ate four brownies” implicates “I did not eat more than 4”.
- Violating a maxim involves making an INFELICITOUS statement.
- (flouting) penmanship example again
- Use by lawyers:
 - L: Do you have a Swiss bank account?
 - B: No.
 - L: Have you ever had one?
 - B: My company had one 5 years ago for 6 months.

Maxim of Quality

- “Say only what you have reason to believe is true.”
- (obeying) Any normal statement.
- (flouting) You’re a breath of fresh air in my life. (metaphor)
- (flouting) sarcasm, irony
 - What great weather!
 - He’s a real genius!

Maxim of Relation

- “Be relevant.”
- (obeying)
 - A: Where’s Sue?
 - B: Well, I saw a blue Chevy in front of Sam’s house.
- (flouting)
 - A: Do you like my dress?
 - B: The weather’s really nice today.

Maxim of Manner

- “Be brief, clear and unambiguous.”
- (obeying) The Lone Ranger jumped on his horse and rode off into the sunset.
 - implicating sequence, not part of semantic meaning of AND
 - The Lone Ranger rode off into the sunset and jumped on his horse.
- (obeying) Chris ate an entire apple pie for dessert and got violently ill.
 - implicating causality

Scripts and Frames as Bases for Inference

- FRAMES as bases for inference
 - Frame is a knowledge structure that lets you get, e.g., “the cabinets” from “a kitchen”
- SCRIPTS as bases for inference
 - Same thing for processes, e.g., going to a restaurant

Presuppositions as Bases for Inference

- When an assumption about what you and I both agree on is encoded in the utterance itself, it's called a PRESUPPOSITION.
- Examples
 - I have to go home and walk THE DOG. (presupposes existence)
 - Did you see THE BROKEN HEADLIGHT?
 - Have you stopped smoking yet?
 - I regret breaking the vase.
- Test for presupposition: constancy under negation.

Presupposition Triggers

- Factive verbs: know, realize, regret (cf. non-factive *think, believe*)
- Definite article (*the*): the headlight, my dog
- Change of state verbs: stop, melt, freeze
- Presuppositions are defeasible