

Pragmatics

What is Pragmatics?

- ▶ Identifying the semantic contribution of words and sentences gets us only partway to understanding what an utterance means because the context in which a sentence is uttered may critically affect the meaning that the speaker intends.
- ▶ Pragmatics
 - The study of the ways people use language in actual conversations
 - Studies both how context helps to determine whether a particular utterance is appropriate or inappropriate as well as how changes to context alter sentences' meanings

Language in Context

- ▶ Context can affect an utterance's meaning
- ▶ Sentence vs utterance
 - ▶ A sentence is an abstract idea or entity (*italics*); it does not have a context
 - ▶ An utterance is not an abstraction; it is an event, something that happens (*quotations*)
 - ▶ Properties of utterance: time, place, volume, speaker of an utterance (*context*)
- ▶ How Context Affects Meaning
- ▶ Deictic or “placeholder” words, whose meanings are determined by the context
 - (1) He is there now
- ▶ Different meanings depending on the context
 - (2) Can you take the trash out?
 - ▶ Requesting, inquiring, pestering, trashing being a person
 - ▶ default, “out-of-the-blue” meaning

Types of Context

- ▶ Linguistic context
 - ▶ What preceded a particular utterance in a discourse
 - ▶ Made up of all the sentences that have been uttered in a discourse leading up to the utterance in question
- ▶ Situational context
 - ▶ Information about the situation in which an utterance is uttered
 - ▶ Allows us to refer to things in the world around us even if they have not been mentioned before in the discourse
 - ▶ Apply our situational knowledge to what we hear all the time
 - ▶ “It smells”, “The governor was on TV last night”
- ▶ Social context
 - ▶ Information about the relationships between the people who are speaking and what their roles are
 - ▶ “yes ma’am”: respect, sarcasm
 - ▶ “Can you take out the trash?”: command, request

Felicity: Appropriateness Relative to a Context

- ▶ Felicitous vs infelicitous (#)
- ▶ Felicitous: situationally appropriate, one that is appropriate relative to the context in which it is uttered
- ▶ Felicity is a property of utterances, not a property of sentences

(3) There is a platypus in the bathtub.

(4) *There is platypus in bathtub the.

(5) A: What do you do for a living?

B: I'm a linguistics professor at Ohio State.

(6) A: What do you do for a living?

B: #I have a job.

(7) A: What do you do for a living?

B: #My favorite color is purple, too!

Rules of Conversation

- ▶ Rules for Conversation
 - ▶ The use of language, like other forms of social behavior, is also governed by social rules.
 - ▶ Some of these rules are designed to protect people's feelings by showing respect or politeness (e.g., rules governing whether you can use a first name in addressing someone or must use a title and last name)
 - ▶ More essential are rules designed to protect the integrity of our communication: rules that allow our communication to work
- ▶ H. P. Grice's (1931-88) Cooperative Principle
 - ▶ Conversational rules or maxims that regulate conversation and enforce compliance with the Cooperative Principle
 - ▶ Rules function as guidelines in order to help ensure effective communication
 - ▶ Felicitous utterances are ones that follow Grice's maxims

(1) Kim: How are you today?

Sandy: Oh, Harrisburg is the capital of Pennsylvania.

Kim: Really? I thought the weather would be warmer.

Story of Human Language

Sandy: Well, in my opinion, the soup could use a little more salt.

Hye-Won Choi

Grice's Maxims

The Maxims of Quality

- ▶ Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - ▶ Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.
-
- ▶ biologist vs a person who's been bitten
- (2) The venom of the purple-toothed spider isn't strong enough to kill people.
- ▶ The speaker has followed Grice's maxims by saying what he does not believe to be false and something for which he has adequate evidence based on the situation
- (3) Well, when I was bitten by a purple-toothed spider, I didn't die. So at least I know what the venom doesn't always kill people.

The Maxim of Relevance

- ▶ Be relevant.
 - ▶ Prevents random topic shifts; people we are talking with are cooperative and they are doing their best to make the conversation work
 - ▶ Allows us to make inferences
- (4) Alana: Is Jamie dating anyone these days?
Sam: Well, she goes to Cleveland every weekend.
- ▶ It may be violated; asks for permission to break the rule
- (5) Rachel: We should think of something fun to do this weekend!
Sarah: Can we talk about something that happened to me in class instead? I want your advice about something.

The Maxims of Quantity

- ▶ Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- ▶ Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- ▶ Specificity or the “strength of the claim”
- ▶ “What are you going to do over the weekend?”
 - In class or scheduling an appointment with a friend
- ▶ “Where did you grow up?”
 - (6) a. On the corner of Main Street and Minor Road
 - b. In Dayton
 - c. In Dayton, Ohio
 - d. In Dayton, Ohio, on the corner of Main Street and Minor Road
 - e. In Ohio
 - f. In the Midwest
 - g. In the United States

The Maxims of Manner

- ▶ Avoid obscurity of expression. (*jargon, *too complex sentences)
- ▶ Avoid ambiguity. (He promised to phone at noon)
- ▶ Be brief. (different from Maxim of Quantity “Do not give too much information”)
- ▶ Be orderly.

- ▶ Critical in regulating how intelligible the speaker's utterances are

(7) A: What do you do for a living?

B: I'm a linguistics instructor.

(8) A: What do you do for a living?

B: #What I do is that I'm an instructor and the subject matter that I teach is linguistics.

(9) # Leslie read fifty pages and opened her book.

(10) # My mother didn't really want my room to be painted purple. I was worried that I wouldn't get good grades at the new school. When I was a child, my favorite color was purple. I worked very hard in all of my classes to get good grades. My mother told me that if I got good grades, I could paint my room. When I was ten years old, I switched to a new school. I wanted to paint my bedroom a bright color.

Flouting Maxims

- ▶ Sometimes people violate the maxims on purpose (e.g. lying) and other times by accident
- ▶ Speakers may use the maxims in order to communicate indirectly.
 - ▶ To avoid saying something directly because doing so could hurt us or because doing so could hurt someone else
 - ▶ flouting the maxim of quantity: recommendation letter

(11) Dear Colleague:

Mr. John J. Jones has asked me to write a letter on his behalf. Let me say that Mr. Jones is unfailingly polite, is neatly dressed at all times, and is always on time for his classes.

Sincerely yours,

Harry H. Homer

- ▶ flouting the maxim of relevance: to change the topic
- ▶ flouting the maxim of quality: “Right, and I’m Cookie Monster”, “I’m totally awed” (sarcastic comment)

Drawing Conclusions: Entailment

- ▶ Entailment: sentence X entails sentence Y if whenever X is true, Y must be true as well

(1) X: Ian eats a large breakfast every day.

Y: Ian eats a large breakfast on Mondays.

- ▶ Entailment indicates a commitment from the speaker's point of view
- ▶ Entailment is a relationship based on literal meaning, irrespective of an utterance's context
- ▶ An utterance's context often helps us to convey information or to draw conclusions → implicature (speaker), inference (hearer)

Inference, Implication, and Implicature

- ▶ An inference is drawn that does not involve linguistic communication
 - ▶ The employee glancing his watch implying that the meeting is running long
 - ▶ The supervisor infers that the employee wishes the meeting to end
- ▶ An inference is a conclusion that a person is reasonably entitled to draw based on a set of circumstances
- ▶ An implicature is a conclusion that is drawn about what people mean based on what we know about how conversation works; when a speaker implies something using language, we say that her utterance contains an implicature

Implicature based on the Maxim of Relevance

- ▶ X does not entail Y
- ▶ The conclusion of Y is an inference: it is based on an implicature rather than an entailment

(2) Speaker 1: I'd really like a cup of coffee.

Speaker 2: There's a place around the corner called Joe's.

(3) X: There's a place around the corner called Joe's.

Y: Joe's sells coffee.

(4) Alana: Is Jamie dating anyone these days?

Sam: Well, she goes to Cleveland every weekend.

Implicature based on the Maxim of Quantity

- ▶ Make your contribution as informative as is required.
- ▶ Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

(5) Mother: Have you done your homework for all of your classes yet?

Son: I've finished my history homework.

(6) X: I've finished my history homework.

Y: I have not finished my homework for my other classes.

(7) Gail: How far can you run without stopping?

Kim: Ten miles.

Gail: I guess you can't run a whole marathon without stopping, then.

Kim: Nonsense, I've done it a number of times.

Implicature Based on the Maxim of Manner

- ▶ Be orderly.

(8) Rebecca took the medication and had an allergic reaction.

(9) Rebecca had a allergic reaction and took the medication.

- ▶ Be brief.

(10) The man who lives with me is an electrician.

- Cf. a husband, son, or brother
- Using the lengthier expression, the speaker implicates that she does not have one of these other more specific kinds of relationships to the electrician

Implicature Based on the Maxim of Quality

- ▶ We may draw inferences based on the assumption that we have the same standards for evidence as do our conversational partners

(11) Sandy: We need someone to make some sort of cake for the picnic.

Tom: I can make my family's favorite chocolate cake.

(12) X: I can make my family's favorite chocolate cake.

Y: I have succeeded in making this cake before.

- ▶ This inference is not entailed by Tom's statement

(13) Sandy: I thought you said you could make this cake!

Tom: Well, I thought I could.

The Significance of Implicatures to Communication

- ▶ The system of implicature is a kind of side effect of Grice's maxims, maxims whose primary reason for being is to regulate conversation
- ▶ Implicatures allow us to introduce ideas into a discourse with less commitment than we would have to express were we entailing the same propositions
 - ▶ In (4), Sam wants Alana to draw her own conclusions; implicatures give him a way to communicate the idea he has in mind while still protecting himself from committing to the truth of a proposition that he does not want to commit to.
- ▶ Implicatures make our conversation easier.
 - ▶ If we were forced to speak only in logically impeccable ways, making sure that what we said entailed every fact that we wanted our hearer to conclude, conversation would proceed at a very slow pace.
- ▶ We use context and other knowledge about the universe to draw inferences from what we hear because it allows us to use language more effectively

Speech Acts

- Speech Acts: convey information, request information, give orders, make requests, make threats, give warnings, make bets, give advice, offer apologies, tell jokes, pay compliments, etc.

- (1) John Jones has five dollars.
- (2) Who ate my porridge?
- (3) Shut up.
- (4) Please scratch my nose.
- (5) Do that again, and I'll punch your lights out.
- (6) There is a mouse in the back seat of your car.
- (7) Five bucks says that the Buckeyes will beat the Wolverines this year.
- (8) You ought to go to class at least once a quarter.

(9) Some common speech acts and their functions.

Speech Act	Function
Assertion	Conveys information
Question	Elicits information
Request	(more or less politely) Elicits action or information
Order	Demands action
Promise	Commits the speaker to an action
Threat	Commits the speaker to an action that the hearer does not want

- Some of the felicity conditions for a speech act may be suspended in certain context.
 - Questions: people playing trivia games, lawyers questioning witnesses, teachers giving exams

Felicity Conditions

(10) Felicity conditions for requests

In order for a speaker to felicitously request a hearer to complete some action, it should be the case that...

- a. The speaker believes that the action has not yet been done.
- b. The speaker wants the action to be done (or thinks that the action should be done for some reason).
- c. The speaker believes that the hearer is able to do the action.
- d. The speaker believes that the hearer may be willing to do things of that sort for the speaker.

(11) Felicity conditions for questions

In order for a speaker to felicitously question a hearer about some state of affairs, it should be the case that...

- a. The speaker does not know some piece of information about some state of affairs.
- b. The speaker wants to know that information about the state of affairs.
- c. The speaker believes that the hearer may be able to supply the information about the state of affairs that the speaker wants.

Performative Speech Acts

- ▶ Performative speech acts, performative verbs

(12) I assert that John Jones has five dollars.

(13) I ask who ate my porridge.

(14) I order you to shut up.

(15) I request that you scratch my nose.

(16) I threaten you that if you do that again, I'll punch your lights out.

(17) I warn you that there is a mouse in the back of your car.

(18) I bet you five bucks that the Buckeyes will eat the Wolverines this year.

(19) I advise you to go to class at least once a quarter.

- ▶ Ceremonies: performative speech acts that change something about the world;
authority of the speaker

(20) I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.

(21) I christen this ship the *U.S.S. Language*.

(22) I hereby dub you Sir Lancelot.

(23) We declare the defendant not guilty.

Identifying Performative Speech Acts

- ▶ Subject must be *I* or *we*.

- ▶ They must use the present tense.

(24) I promise to take him to a bar tonight.

(25) John promises to take me to a bar tonight.

(26) I will promise to take him to a bar tonight.

- ▶ The *hearby* test

(27) I hereby promise to take him to a bar tonight.

(28) #John hereby promises to take me to a bar tonight.

(29) #I will hereby promise to take him to a bar tonight.

- ▶ A performative verb is used to perform a speech act other than the one it names: promise → threat

(30) I promise to tell Mom If you touch my toys one more time.

Direct and Indirect Speech Acts

- ▶ Direct speech acts
 - By making a direct, literal utterance: (1)-(8)
 - By using a performative verb that names the speech act: (12)-(19)
- ▶ Indirect speech acts: trying to be polite

(31) Questions

A: Direct

- a. Did John marry Helen?
- b. I ask you whether or not John married Helen.

B: Indirect

- a. I don't know if John married Helen. (cf. (11a))
- b. I would like to know if John married Helen. (cf. (11b))
- c. Do you know whether John married Helen? (cf. (11c))

(32) Requests

A: Direct

- a. (Please) Take out the garbage.
- b. I request that you take out the garbage.

B: Indirect

- a. The garbage hasn't been taken out yet. (cf. (10a))
- b. I would like for you to take out the garbage. (cf. (10b))
- c. Could you take out the garbage? (cf. (10c))
- d. Would you mind taking out the garbage? (cf. (10d))

- We can perform an indirect speech act in many cases by appealing to a particular one of its felicity conditions; they are indicative of politeness considerations on behalf of the speaker
- Identifying indirect speech acts
 - Whether there is a performative verb → direct speech act
 - Whether felicity conditions are violated for the sentence's literal meaning but not for its intended meaning. (32B.c) not a direct speech act of questioning, but an indirect speech act of making a request
 - Consider the way people normally respond to it: assertion (by a signal of acknowledgment such as a nod or a verbal response *Oh, I see*; question (by a confirmation or denial, information being solicited); request or command (carrying out the action or refusing with some explanation)

Sentence and Their Relation to Speech Acts

- ▶ Certain speech acts are so common that many languages have syntactic structures conventionally used to mark them

(33)

Sentence Type	Examples
Declarative	He is cooking the chicken.
Interrogative	Is he cooking the chicken? Who is cooking the chicken?
Imperative	Cook the chicken.

- ▶ On the surface, it may seem as though each kind of sentence type is specifically designed for one of the speech acts that we have discussed above. This association does not always hold.
- ▶ The key is context

(34) Ways to use different sentence forms to complete various speech

27

Type of Sentence	Type of Speech Act		
	Assertion	Question	Order/Request
Declarative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Columbus is the capital of Ohio.• I'm telling you that Columbus is the capital of Ohio.• I hereby assert that the capital of Ohio is Columbus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I would like to know what the capital of Ohio is.• I've been wondering about which city is the capital of Ohio.• I ask you what the capital of Ohio is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It would make me very happy if you would take out the garbage.• I need you to take out the garbage.• I order you to take out the garbage.
Interrogative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Did you know that Columbus is the capital of Ohio?• May I inform you that Columbus is the capital of Ohio?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the capital of Ohio?• Can you tell me what the capital of Ohio is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Will you take out the garbage?• Would you mind terribly if I asked you to take out the garbage?
Imperative	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Remember that Columbus is the capital of Ohio.• Let me tell you that Columbus is the capital of Ohio.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell me what the capital of Ohio is.• Let me ask you what the capital of Ohio is.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Take out the garbage.• Don't forget to take out the garbage.• Allow me to request that you take out the garbage.

Presupposition

► Presuppositions of Existence (File 7.5.1, p.294)

(1) The Amazon River runs through northern Europe.

(2) The Bvryzax River runs through northern Europe.

(3) First co-worker: #I'm sorry that I was late to our meeting. I had to take my pet giraffe to the veterinarian.

Second co-worker: Wait a minute! You have a pet giraffe?

(4) I'm sorry that I was late to our meeting. I have a pet giraffe, and it hasn't been feeling well, so I had to take it to the veterinarian.

Presuppositions and Truth Values

- (5) a. Yesterday, Disneyland had over 3,000 visitors.
b. Yesterday, Disneyland did not have over 3,000 visitors.
- (6) a. #The Bvryzax River reaches a depth of 25 meters.
b. The Bvryzax River does not reach a depth of 25 meters.
- (7) a. Linus came back to the pumpkin patch this October.
b. Linus did not come back to the pumpkin patch this October.
- (8) a. Alan stopped falling asleep during meetings.
b. Alan did not stop falling asleep during meetings.
- (9) a. After the United States added a fifty-fourth state, the U.S. flag design was modified to contain 54 stars.
b. After the United States added a fifty-fourth state, the U.S. flag design was not modified to contain 54 stars. (Instead, the decision was made to keep the old flag design.)

Prosody as a Presupposition Trigger

(10) a. Jessica went to Toledo. LAURA went to Toledo, too.

b. #Laura went to Fort Wayne. LAURA went to Toledo, too.

(11) a. #Jessica went to Toledo. Laura went to TOLEDO, too.

b. Laura went to Fort Wayne. Laura went to TOLEDO, too.

Presupposition Accommodation

(12) a. I'm sorry that I was late to our meeting; I had to take my pet cat to the veterinarian.

b. I'm sorry that I was late to our meeting; my car broke down.

(13) Roommate: Guess what I did today!

You: What?

Roommate: #I also went to the LIBRARY.

(14) I'm so happy that it's snowing!