
Lecture 1

语 用 学

Pragmatics

Meaning in context

18 September 2023

Personal Information

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Qualifications

- **Journal publications (2014-2023):**
- 2023 (Dai, Y. and Y. Wu). Review of grammaticalization. ***Journal of Historical Pragmatics***.
- 2022 (Li, F. and Y. Wu) Self-praise of Chinese and American celebrities on TV talk shows. ***East Asian Pragmatics*** 7(2): 267-290.
- 2021 (Zhang, H., Zhao, J. and Y. Wu). Disagreement and mitigation in power-asymmetrical venture capital reality TV shows: A comparative case study of Shark Tank in the US and Dragon's Den in China. ***Intercultural Pragmatics*** 245-276.
- 2021 (Yang, X. and Y. Wu). Efficiency in shaping grammars: The case of multiple occurrences of the Chinese reflexive. ***Pragmatics and Society*** 12(2): 223-242.
- 2019 (Zhang, H. and Wu, Y.). **(Core) common ground and the role of metapragmatic expressions.** ***Journal of Pragmatics***.

Publications

- 2017 (Xu, X., Chen, Q., Panther, K. and Wu, Y.). **The influence of concessive and causal conjunctions on pragmatic processing: Online measures from eye movements and self-paced reading.** *Discourse Processes.*
- 2016 (Xu, C., Zhang, C. and Wu, Y.). **Enlarging the scope of metaphor studies.** *Intercultural Pragmatics.*
- 2015 (Yang, X. and Wu, Y.). **Whether or not multiple occurrences of the Chinese reflexive can take distinct antecedents: A deictic perspective.** *Journal of Pragmatics.*
- 2014 (Li, Y. and Wu, Y.). **The semantics and pragmatics of the [CHI 'eat' + Non-food NP] construction.** *Intercultural Pragmatics.*
- 2014 (Xu, C. and Wu, Y.). **Metaphors in the perspective of argumentation.** *Journal of Pragmatics.*

Outline of today's lecture

- What is Pragmatics? What does it do?
 - Syntax - Semantics - Pragmatics
 - Meaning and Context
- Central topics of pragmatics
- Some remarks on the field (*books, journals, etc.*), which may be of some help for those who want to go for further study.
- Teaching schedule

0. A few words about the course

- **Pragmatics**, the study of **language use**, is a relatively easy yet very important course.
 - Famous sayings: “行事不可任心，说话不可任口。” ---曾国藩
“两年学说话，一生学闭嘴。” ---海明威
 - Why? It appeals to both scholars and ordinary people.
(雅俗共赏的一门学问).
 - People actually **do pragmatics** every day.
 - Scholars won **Nobel Prize** for doing research on pragmatic issues.

People do *pragmatics* every day

当金星遇到张邵刚



张绍刚：一边是男人，另外一边是女人。

金星：我是什么人呢？



There's some sort of pragmatics here in this short dialogue.
What do you think of Zhang's response?

People do *pragmatics* every day

对话发生在一个老太太和一位浙大教授之间。

- 老太太：这是你孙子吧？
- 教授：哦，我是孙子的爸爸。

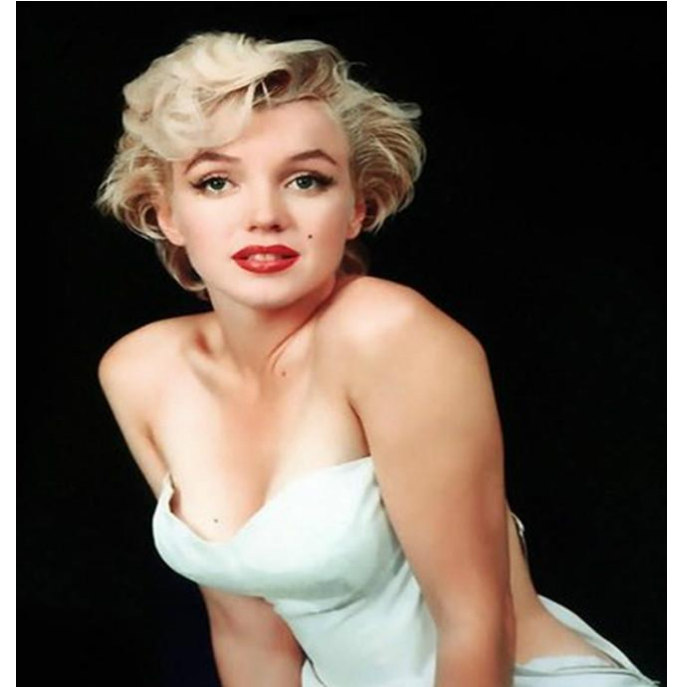


Questions: 1. What do you think of the professor' s answer?

Our professor was a very smart pragmaticist, who cleverly responded to the old lady.

People do pragmatics every day

- **Interviewer:** Did you really pose for that calendar with nothing on?
- **Marilyn Monroe:** I had the radio on.



What do you think of the Monroe's answer?

The gorgeous star is also a smart **pragmaticist** !

Pragmatics is everywhere

- 法国尼斯“娇小西拉”餐厅的餐牌上写着：
- 说“**来杯咖啡**”，付7欧元；
- 说“**请给我来杯咖啡**”，付4.25欧元；
- 说“**你好，请给我来杯咖啡**”，惊喜价1.4欧元。

--摘自《青年文摘》

- This is related to the pragmatic issue of politeness. Of course, **politeness should be rewarded!**

Humans are sensitive to language use

- As you can see, people are very sensitive to the use of each other's language.
- How about children? They too!



This is related to the issue of Face and Politeness.

Scholars won Nobel Prize for researching pragmatic issues

■ 2014 Nobel Prize for the brain's GPS discovery (BBC, 6 Oct 2014)

■ The Nobel Prize for physiology or medicine has been awarded to three scientists who discovered the brain's “**GPS** system” (*global positioning system* 定位系统).



■ They discovered how the brain knows **where we are** and is able to **navigate from one place to another** (Note that this is a **pragmatic** issue, **deixis** (指示, 指引), which will be introduced later in this course).

■ “The discoveries have solved a problem that has occupied philosophers and scientists for centuries,” the Nobel Assembly said.
诺贝尔评委会：这一发现解决了困扰哲学家和科学家数个世纪的难题

■ (There must be some truth behind the common phenomena we see in everyday life.)

A huge project on pragmatics is going on

- In a special collection of articles published in **Science** beginning 1 July 2005, scientists raise 125 big questions that face scientific inquiry over the next quarter-century (i.e. 2005-2030). There are top 25 which need to be addressed urgently, one of which is “**How the (human) cooperative behaviour evolved**” (人类合作性行为是如何发展出来的) .



This is clearly a question of pragmatics, precisely **cooperative principle** which will be introduced later in this course (Note that there is an ongoing huge project (over 20 million Euros) on this issue in *Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics*) .

1. What is Pragmatics

- **Charles W. Morris** (1901-1979), American semiotician and philosopher. Morris was supervised by **Charles S. Pierce** (1839-1914), who was also a semiotician. Some say that Pierce was the proponent of pragmatics, but it was Morris who made pragmatics an academic discipline.
- In his ***Foundations of the Theory of Signs*** (1938), Morris proposed that **semiotics** (符号学), the science of signs, should have three divisions:
 - ❑ **Syntax** - relation of signs (/words) to each other
 - ❑ **Semantics** – signs (/words) and things which they denote (e.g. *bird*, *dog*)
 - ❑ **Pragmatics** – signs (/words) and interpreters



(Note that **Ferdinand de Saussure** (1857-1913), **the father of modern linguistics**, also talked about the relevant concepts, and it is his concepts of the sign/signifier/signified that form the core of semiotics).

Syntax

Syntax is rule-based (note that the syntax of a language is just like the law of a society)

- How to combine words to form larger linguistic units such as phrases and sentences, e.g. **A boy killed a dog / A dog killed a boy**, the two sentences are different in meaning coz they are formed in **different orders/syntax**.
- How to distinguish **grammatical** from **un-grammatical** sentences.
 - **Helen a house bought yesterday.* {NO, coz English has an SVO word order}
 - *Helen bought a house yesterday.* [YES]
 - **Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.* [YES]

Semantics

Study of meaning in language itself

Formal Semantics

- Each sentence expresses some **proposition** (“命题”) (a term borrowed from Logic), i.e. **a state of affairs** (人或物的状况).
- **Understanding a sentence** means **knowing its truth conditions**, i.e. whether or not **the state of affairs** described by the sentence is true. E.g. *Prof. Wu teaches pragmatics* (The sentence is true at the time when it is uttered; it is false if ‘pragmatics’ is replaced by ‘politics’);
- (Formal) semanticists use logic to represent propositions, i.e. to capture **the truth-conditional meaning (roughly ‘literal’)** of a sentence.

Semantics and Pragmatics

But

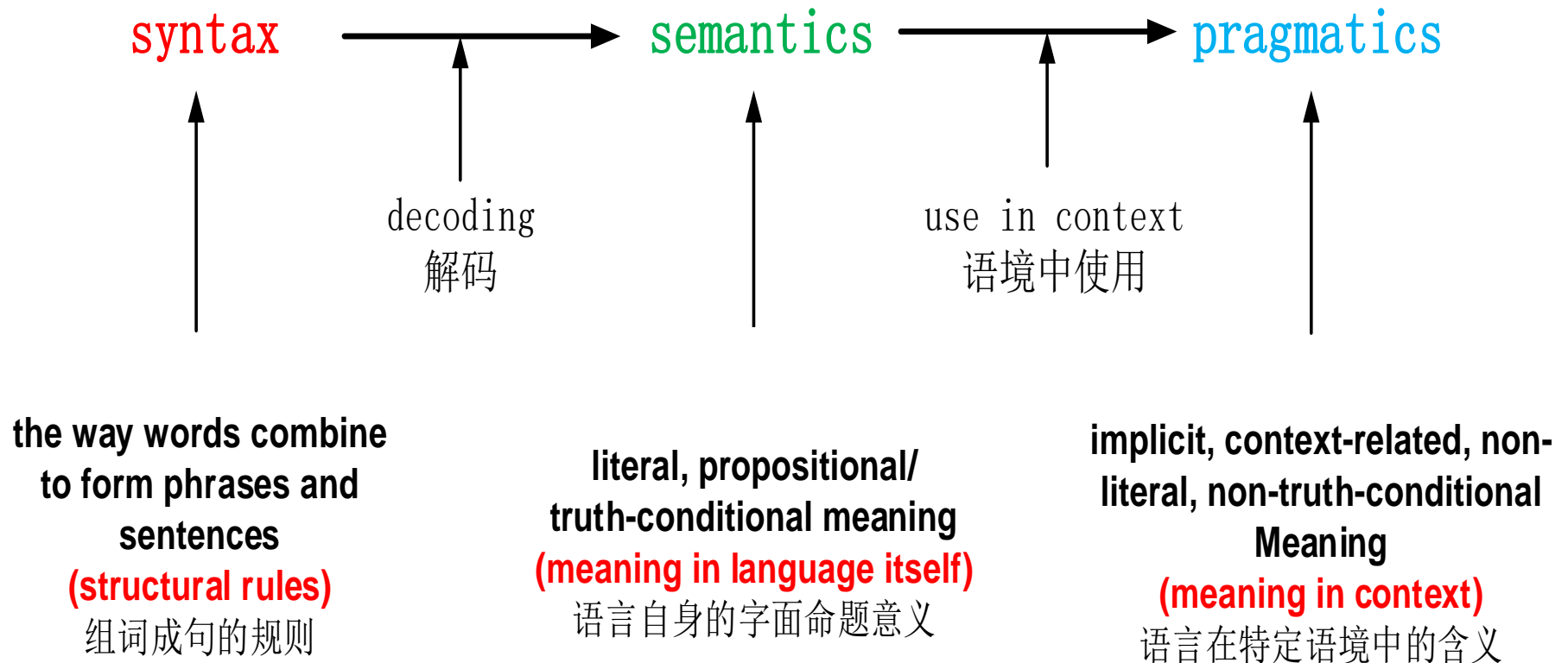
- During the course of everyday communication, human beings as social animals convey **more than** the literal, propositional meaning (i.e. we don't always mean what we say literally);
- There is **more** to the literal meaning of a sentence when we consider the sentence **in relation to the context**, i.e. **the situation of uttering the sentence**.

Semantics and Pragmatics

- It is no longer possible to consider sentences in isolation.
 - Instead of using 'sentence', **Pragmaticists** prefer '**utterance**' (“话语”), which can be defined as a meaningful sequence of **words uttered in context**. So, '**utterance**' has a pragmatic flavour.
 - Pragmatics looks *beyond truth-conditional meanings* (note that this is what semanticists usu. care about) and explores **non-literal, implicit, context-related meanings**.
语用学考察真值语义之外的意义，即非字面的、隐含的、与语境相关的意义
- Therefore, **both semantics and pragmatics deal with meaning**, yet there is a division of labour: *semantics* deals with *meaning in language*, whereas *pragmatics* deals with *meaning in context* (usually the kind of implicit meanings).

Syntax, semantics and pragmatics

The holistic picture is



1.1 Definition of pragmatics

- The word ‘pragmatics’ derives from the **Greek** word ‘**pragma**’, which means ‘**matter**’, ‘**thing**’, and ‘**action**’.
- In general terms, **Pragmatics** can be defined **as the study of language use**. More specifically, it is the study of **how contextual factors interact with linguistic meaning** in the interpretation of language (cf. Sperber & Wilson 2005, Pragmatics, in F.Jackson & M.Smith (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*).

1.2 *Context is the soul of pragmatics*

- From the examples given above, we can see that (i) **pragmatics** is essentially about **meaning in context**; and (ii) **context** figures prominently in pragmatic studies.
- So we can say (it is no exaggeration!) that **context is the soul of pragmatic studies!**

Context is the soul of pragmatic studies



Question: How do you understand “情” on the noticeboard?

As you know, the Chinese character “情” is a multi-sense word (it could mean *emotion*, *love*, *situation*, etc.). What does it possibly mean here?

A hint: we are supposed to consider the situation we are currently in.

Pragmatic meaning and context

■ *You make good coffee.*

- Out of context, this sentence expresses a proposition (*i.e. the listener is in a state of being good at making coffee*). But depending on the context, it can mean more than just a proposition (**i.e. more than one meaning!**).
- In other words, it can express additional meanings (*i.e.*, those **additional to a proposition**) when used in everyday communication.

Pragmatic meaning and context

- Conversational partners may succeed in communicating **much more than what is literally said** by the words of a sentence.

A: Do I make good coffee?

B: Yes, **you do/make good coffee**. (what is said = what is meant)
(Is there any pragmatics in this dialogue here?)

A: Do you think I'm a good cook?

B: **You make good coffee**. (what is said \neq what is implied)
(B does not answer A's question directly. There must be a reason!)

A: It's your turn to make coffee.

B: **You make good coffee**. (what is said \neq what is implied)

2. Central Topics (relevant to context)

- **Pragmatics is like an ocean!** This means that **anything** (*lexical, cultural, historical, social and cognitive stuff, etc.*) **related to the use of language** can possibly become **a topic of pragmatic studies**.

Lexical
Pragmatics, e.g.
usage of queen

Intercultural
Pragmatics, e.g.
哪里哪里

Historical
Pragmatics, e.g.
Use of please

Socio-
pragmatics,
e.g. use of 你-您 etc.



Do you know...?

- **Which word** is the most frequently used one in today's spoken English?
- Possibly...
- About four hundred years' ago, you wouldn't be considered rude if you didn't use it, e.g.
 - You just say "*Coffee*", "*I want a coffee*".
- BUT it will be considered **bad manners** if you say that way nowadays.

2. Central Topics (relevant to context)

- However, there are four central topics in pragmatics:
 - **Deixis** (指示词): direct utterance context as a resource for constructing reference, e.g. 我, 你, 他/她, 这/那里
 - **Presupposition** (预设): *The queen was pregnant. Oh, my God, who did it? → There was a queen in the UK.*
 - Meaning additional to proposition: **Conversational Implicature** (会话含义, 即“话里有话”), see the examples given.
 - It is essential to consider **utterances as acts**, i.e. **Speech Acts** (言语行为). *I declare Beijing Winter Olympics open.*
说话即做事



3. Some remarks on the field

- **Books:** There are many reference books for beginners. The most used ones probably are

- 陈新仁, 2009/2021, 《新编语用学教程》(英文版), 外研社。
- Yan Huang's *Pragmatics* (2006/2015, OUP).
- Stephen Levinson, *Pragmatics* (1983/2000, CUP)
- George Yule, *Pragmatics* (1996/2011, OUP)

(Note that there are also many introductory books in Chinese. A popular one is 李捷、何自然、霍永寿 主编, 2011, 《语用学十二讲》, 华东师范大学出版社。)

3. Some remarks on the field

- **Journals:** There are some international journals of pragmatics which you can read regularly.
 - *Journal of Pragmatics* (monthly; since 1977)
 - *Intercultural Pragmatics* (quarterly; since 2004)
 - *Pragmatics* (quarterly publication of the International Pragmatics Association since 1991)
 - *Pragmatics and Society* (biannually; since 2010)
 - *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (biannually)

4. Summary

What is Pragmatics

- ❑ *Syntax*: study of grammatical rules
- ❑ *Semantics*: study of meaning in language itself
- ❑ *Pragmatics*: study of meaning in context
 - *Central topics*
 - *Field* (books, journals, etc.)
- ❑ **Readings**: Chapter I of *Chen, Levinson, Yule, and Huang*

Class information

Time and Venue	10:00 – 11:35 Building East 1A–202
References	Electronic versions have already been uploaded to Pragmatics2023@163.com . Code: Prag2023 The PPT of each lecture will be uploaded, too.
Examination	attendance 20% presentation 30% term paper 50% (Note that it may be subject to change)
Office and Office hours	Building East 5–304 2pm – 5pm, Fri afternoons

Schedule (Please note that it may be subject to change)

Lecture 1	Introduction to Pragmatics	Lecture 9	Politeness Principle
Lecture 2	Context, Deixis and Reference	Lecture 10	Relevance Theory
Lecture 3	Presupposition	Lecture 11	Student Presentation
Lecture 4	Conversational Implicature	Lecture 12	Lexical Pragmatics
Lecture 5	Student Presentation	Lecture 13	Historical Pragmatics
Lecture 6	Conversation Analysis	Lecture 14	Intercultural Pragmatics
Lecture 7	Speech Acts	Lecture 15	Student Presentation
Lecture 8	Student Presentation	Lecture 16	Review

Homework

WTO = watch + think + others?

- **Watch:** *My Fair Lady* (《窈窕淑女》, 爱奇艺、土豆网等有带字幕视频)

- **Think:**

- Why are humans so sensitive to each other's use of language? (note that this is genuinely a thought-provoking question)
- Can you tell a story to illustrate how important context is?

- **Other questions?**

