Detecting Meaning with Sherlock Holmes*

Pragmatics and Discourse

Francis Bond

Division of Linguistics and Multilingual Studies

http://www3.ntu.edu.sg/home/fcbond/

bond@ieee.org

Location: LT25

Overview

➤ Review

➤ Context

➤ Conversation and Cooperation

➤ Conversational Maxims

➤ Politeness

➤ Indirect Speech

➤ Summary

Revision

Idioms and Metaphors

➤ Many phrases have meanings that cannot be predicted from the meanings of the individual words

  ➤ *take into one's confidence*
  ➤ *take in*
  ➤ *Sherlock Holmes*
  ➤ *practical joke(r)*
  ➤ *in love*

➤ Metaphors extend the use of words beyond their primary meaning to describe referents that bear similarities to the word's primary referent.

  (1) *"Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me"*

UNDERSTANDING is LIGHT

Reference and Context

We interpret words in context

➤ For example, in a restaurant

    (2)   *Have you got the new <u>C.J. Cherryh</u>?* "book by ∼"

➤ In a snooker (pool) game

    (3)   *I have two <u>reds</u> left* "red balls"

➤ **metonymy**: substituting the name of an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself

    (4)   *<u>The ham sandwich</u> is at table three* "person who ordered ∼"
    (5)   *I spent all morning with <u>the suits</u>* "person who habitually wears ∼"[1]

➤ **synecdoche**: substituting the name of a part for the name of a thing
(a kind of metonymy)

    (6)   *We need some more willing <u>hands</u>* "person with ∼"

? Give examples of metonymy and synechdoche

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[1]A person who wears matching jacket and trousers, especially a boss or a supervisor (pejorative)

All knowledge is context

➢ Knowledge to interpret utterances can come from multiple sources

1. **Deixis**: The physical context of the utterance
   ➢ *My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her.* "221B Baker Street" SPEC

2. **Discourse**: What has already been said
   ➢ *The dog chased$_i$ the cat$_j$. Eventually it$_i$ caught it$_j$.*
   ➢ *My stepdaughter$_i$ has been here. I have traced her$_i$.* SPEC

3. **World knowledge**: Background and common knowledge
   ➢ *I would like to go to the moon.* "the Earth's moon"

Context can complete fragments

➤ In a dialogue, we often only add new knowledge

    (7)   a.   *Who moved these chairs?*

              b.   *Sandy (did) [move these chairs]*

    (8)   a.   *Where are you going?*

              b.   *[I am going] (to) Tokyo*

    (9)   a.   *'What is it, then? [Is it] A fire?'*

              b.   *'No [it is not], [It is] a client. …*   SPEC

➤ Normally English requires a complete sentence,

… but here a **fragment** is OK

   If you are interested in this, NTU's LMS is a center for **conversational analysis**.

Conversational Implicature

Cooperation in Conversation

➤ **Cooperative Principle**: people cooperate in conversation

"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."

➤ **Implicature**

The aspect of meaning that a speaker conveys, implies, or suggests without directly expressing.

(10) *Did you do the reading?*

(11) *I meant to.*

Implicates: No

Gricean Maxims

Maxim of Quantity

➢ Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

➢ Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality

➢ Do not say what you believe to be false.

➢ Do not say that for which you lack proper evidence.

Maxim of Relation

➤ Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner

➤ Be perspicuous [= be easily understood]
➤ Avoid obscurity of expression.
➤ Avoid ambiguity
➤ Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
➤ Be orderly

An Example of implicature

Speech that seems to violate the maxims will evoke **implicatures** (inferences about the reason why the speaker violated the maxim(s)). This is because the hearer assumes the speaker is acting in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, and is rational.

(12)   A: *Can you tell me the time?*

Lit: Do you have the ability to tell me the time?

(13)   B: *Well, the milkman has come.*

Lit.: The milkman came at some time prior to the time of speaking.

What is meant:

A Do you have the ability to tell me the time of the present moment, as standardly indicated on a watch, and if so, please do so tell me what time it is.

B No, I don't know the exact time of the present moment, but I can provide some information from which you may be able to deduce the approximate time, namely the milkman, who delivers milk at 6:30am, came at some time prior to the time of speaking.

A flouted Manner — why not request that you are told the time?

B flouted Relation — what does this have to do with the time?

Various Conversational Implicatures

➢ Sometimes no special knowledge is required in the context to calculate the additional conveyed meaning (**Generalized Conversational Implicatures**)

    (14)   *Did you bring the flowers and the card?*

    (15)   *I brought the card.*

            Implicature: but not the flowers.

➢ Most of our conversations take place in very specific contexts in which locally recognized inferences are assumed. (**Particularized Conversational Implicatures**)

    (16)   *Hey Terry, are you coming to the party tonight?*

    (17)   *My parents are visiting.* "So I am busy/So I have a babysitter"

➢ All implicatures are **defeasible**: they can be canceled without a contradiction.

    (18)   *But I can still come.*

Scalar Implicatures

Certain information is communicated by choosing a word which expresses one value from a scale of values.

(19) ⟨ *all, most, many, some, few* ⟩

(20) ⟨ *always, often, sometimes* ⟩

We should choose the word from the scale which is the most informative and truthful in the circumstances (Quantity and Quality):

(21) *I'm doing a major in Linguistics and I've completed some of the required subjects*

(22) *They are often late.*

(23) *I got some of these antiques in London –hang on, actually I think I got most of them there.* (defeasible)

Horn Scales

To form a Horn scale $\langle S, W \rangle$, two words (S and W) must satisfy the following conditions:

(i) $A(S)$ must entail $A(W)$ for some arbitrary sentence frame A;

(ii) S and W must be equally lexicalized;

(iii) S and W must be about the same semantic relations, or from the same semantic field.

➤ Words on the scale implicate the negation of words on their left

    ➢ $\langle$ *always, often, sometimes* $\rangle$.
    ➢ $\langle$ *..., 5, 4, 3, 2, 1* $\rangle$.
    ➢ $\langle$ *hot, warm, lukewarm, cold* $\rangle$.
    ➢ $\langle$ *the*, $\{$*a,some*$\}$ $\rangle$.

Conventional Implicatures

Conventional implicatures are non-truth conditional inferences that are not derived from superordinate pragmatic principles like the [Gricean] maxims, but are simply attached by convention to particular lexical items.

They are non-cancellable:

(24) a. *She was poor, but honest.*
      b. **She was poor but honest, and was in fact rich.*

Flouting the maxims

➤ Quantity: (In answer to *Tell me about him!*:) *He has a nice personality.*

➤ Quality: (In response to something stupid someone did:) *That was brilliant!*

➤ Relation: (In response to *Can I go out and play?*:) *Did you finish your homework?*

➤ Quality:

(25)	*My car breaks down every five minutes*	hyperbole
(26)	*I've got millions of bottles of wine in my cellar*	hyperbole
(27)	*Queen Victoria was made of iron*	metaphor
(28)	*I love it when you sing out of tune*	irony or sarcasm

What happens when we flout?

➢ If someone doesn't understand this, (e.g. someone from another culture), then what was originally intended to be a metaphor may result in a **lie**.

➢ We may flout:

  ➢ Quantity:
    * say more than we need to indicate a sense of occasion, or respect
    * say less than we need, in order to be blunt, or rude
  ➢ Quality:
    * white lies
  ➢ Relation
    * to signal embarrassment
    * to change the subject
  ➢ Manner
    * for the sake of humour
    * to obscure information (parents talking in front of children)
    * to show in-group status, …

Hedges

When we **flout** a maxim, we can use **hedges**:

(29) Quantity:

    a. *As you probably know*, …

    b. *To cut a long story short*, …

(30) Quality:

    a. *In the kitchen, I believe.*   DANC

    b. *As far as I'm aware, Kim is still on medication.*

(31) Relation:

    a. *I don't know if this is will affect the bottom line, but some of the numbers are missing.*

(32) Manner:

    a. *I'm not sure if this makes sense, but the car had no lights.*

Your turn, I guess

Hedges are used when you know you will flout a maxim. Which maxim is flouted in the following hedges (and why)?

(33)   *This may be a bit confused, but I remember being in a car.*

(34)   *I may be mistaken, but I thought I saw a wedding ring on her finger.*

(35)   *I won't bore you with all the details, but it was an exciting trip.*

(36)   *I don't know if this is important, but some of the files are missing.*

(37)   *As far as I know, they're married.*

(38)   *This may sound like a dumb question, but whose handwriting is this?*

(39)   *I don't know if this is clear at all, but I think the other car was reversing.*

(40)   *As you probably know, I am afraid of dogs.*
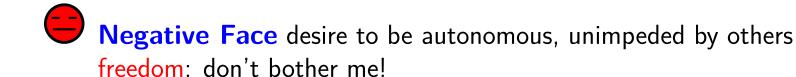
Politeness

Why be Indirect?

➤ Mainly for politeness

    (41)   [Motorist to gas station attendant]

         a. *You don't happen to have any change for the phone do you?*

    (42)   [Doctor to Nurse]

         a. *I'll need a 19 gauge needle, IV tubing and some unobtanium*

    (43)   [Teacher to student?]

         a. *Would you be so kind as to give me a hand with this?*

$\Rightarrow$ Low Status $\rightarrow$ High Status is generally more indirect than High $\rightarrow$ Low

Politeness and Face-Threatening Acts

Positive Face desire to seem worthy and deserving of approval
self-worth: like me!

Negative Face desire to be autonomous, unimpeded by others
freedom: don't bother me!

➤ It is argued that we all have these two faces — they are universal

➤ But they are always under threat!

Brown and Levinson (1987)

Face Threatening Acts

☺ Threaten Positive Face

➢ Hearer
  * explicit expressions of disapproval
  * expressions of indifference, interruption, boasting
  * identification of status (*boy* not *doctor*)
➢ Speaker
  * apologies, accepting a compliment, confession, losing control

☹ Threaten Negative Face

➢ Hearer
  * orders, requests, suggestions, advice
  * compliments, expressions of envy or admiration
  * offers or promises (adds obligation)
➢ Speaker
  * thanks, excuses, acceptance of offers or apologies

Face Saving Strategies

➤ Bald (on-record)

➤ Positive Politeness:

    ➤ be attentive, appeal to in-group, joke
    ➤ reciprocate: *I'll help you if you help me*
    ➤ compliment: *You're looking good today, …*

➤ Negative Politeness:

    ➤ hedge to minimize threat: *I may be wrong but, …*
    ➤ allow for negative face: *Could you please, …*
    ➤ ask indirectly: *Have you got the time, …*

➤ Indirect (off-record)

    ➤ *It's hot in here* "please turn on the aircon"

? Which face is threatened, and how does Holmes save it? *There may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.'* REDH

An example of polite, indirect speech (gone wrong)

(44)   [Knock on the door]

(45)   Leonard: *Wanna get that?*

(46)   Sheldon: *Not particularly.*

(47)   Leonard: *Could you get that?*

(48)   Sheldon: *I suppose I could if I were asked.*

    [Knock on the door]

(49)   Leonard: *Would you please get that?*

(50)   Sheldon: *Well of course!*
    Why do you have to make things so complicated?

Austin's Speech Act Theory

Speech as Action

➤ Language is often used to do things: **speech acts**
  language has both

  ➤ **interactivity**
  ➤ **context dependence**

➤ E.g. If you greet someone or ask them a question, and they don't respond it is very
  awkward

Sentence Types

➤ There are four syntactic types that correlate closely to pragmatic uses

declarative	↔	**assertion**	*This is my friend*
interrogative	↔	**question**	*Are you my friend?*
imperative	↔	**order**	*Be my friend!*
optative	↔	**wish**	*Oh that you were my friend!*

➤ But it turns out there is a lot of flexibility:

(51) a. *Would you like a beer?* question

  b. *Is the pope Catholic?* assertion

  c. *You are sure that she has not sent it yet?* (SCAN) question

Language as Truth

➤ One tradition of semantics is based on these assumptions

    ➤ the basic sentence type is declarative
    ➤ language is mainly used to describe the world
    ➤ meaning can be given in terms of truth values

➤ It doesn't deal well with these

    (52)   *Excuse me!*
    (53)   *Hello.*
    (54)   *How much can a Koala bear?*
    (55)   *Six pints of lager and some nachos, thanks!*
    (56)   *How 'bout them niners?*

Perfomative Utterances

(57) *I promise I won't drive home*

(58) *I bet you 5 bucks they get caught*

(59) *I declare this lecture over*

(60) *I warn you that legal action will ensue*

(61) *I name this ship the Nautilus*

➤ Uttering these (in an appropriate context) is acting
  Utterances themselves can be actions

➤ In English, we can signal this explicitly with **hereby**

Felicity Conditions

➢ Performatives (vs Constantives)
Given the correct **felicity conditions**

   A1 There must exist an accepted conventional procedure that includes saying certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances,

   A2 The circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation

   B1 All participants must do it both correctly

   B2 ...and completely

   C1 The intention must be to do this the act

   C2 The participants must conduct themselves so subsequently.

➢ If the conditions don't hold, the speech act is **infelicitous**

   ➢ Failing **A** or **B** is a **misfire**

   ➢ Failing **C** is an **abuse**

Examples of Infelicities

➤ **A1** *I hereby marry you* (said by someone not authorized to do so)

➤ **A2** *I baptize this baby Harold* (baby's name should Herman)

➤ **A2** *I pronounce John Smith dead* (uttered by a doctor who has confused John Smith with John Smit, or if John Smith is still alive)

➤ **B1** *Yes* (exchanging vows in a Christian marriage ceremony)

➤ **B1** *OK* (in response to *Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?* –wrong formula)

➤ **B2** *I bet you $50 the opposition loses the next election* (infelicitous without a response: *OK –you're on*; Austin calls the required response uptake)

➤ **C1** *Guilty as charged* (if accused known to be innocent by a jury member)

➤ **C2** *I promise to come tomorrow* (if there is no intention to keep to the promise)

Explicit and Implicit Performatives

➤ **Explicit Performatives**

   ➤ Tend to be first person
   ➤ The main verb is a performative: **_promise, warn, sentence, bet, pronounce,_**
      _..._
   ➤ You can use **_hereby_**

➤ **Implicit Performatives**

   (62)   _You are hereby charged with treason_ [by me]
   (63)   _Students are requested to be quiet in the halls_ [by NTU]
   (64)   _10 bucks says they'll be late_ [I bet you]
   (65)   _Come up and see me some time!_ [I invite you]

   Can be made explicit by adding an active perfomative verb

Searle's speech act classification

Declarative changes the world (like performatives)

Representative describes the (speaker's view of the) world

Expressives express how the speaker feels

Directives get someone else to do something

Comissives commit oneself to a future action

Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect speech acts

Sentence Type		Speech Act	Example
declarative	$\leftrightarrow$	**assertion** (statement)	*I sing.*
interrogative	$\leftrightarrow$	**question**	*Do you sing?*
imperative	$\leftrightarrow$	**order** (request, command)	*sing!*
exclamative	$\leftrightarrow$	**exclamation**	*What a voice!*
optative	$\leftrightarrow$	**wish**	*If only I could sing*

Literal and non-literal uses

(66)   a. *Could you get that?*

         b. *Please pass the salt.*

(67)   a. *I wish you wouldn't do that.*

         b. *Please don't do that.*

(68)   a. *You left the door open.*

         b. *Please close the door.*

➢ People have access to both the literal and non-literal meanings

➢ Non literal meanings can be slower to understand

➢ Some non-literal uses are very conventionalized
 Can/Could you X? → *Please X*

➢ Questioning the felicity conditions produces an indirect version

Felicity Conditions for Requesting

These things must hold for an utterance to be a **request**:

➤ **Preparatory 1**: H (hearer) is able to perform A (future action)

➤ **Preparatory 2**: It is not obvious that the H would perform A without being asked

➤ **Propositional:** S (speaker) predicates a future act A of H

➤ **Sincerity:** S wants H to do A

➤ **Essential:** The utterance e counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A

? Form different indirect requests with the following strategies:

1. By querying the preparatory content of the direct request
2. By stating the propositional content of the direct request
3. By querying the propositional content of the direct request
4. By stating the sincerity condition of the direct request.

Indirect Requests

➢ **Preparatory 1**: H is able to perform A

➢ **Preparatory 2**: It is not obvious that the H would perform A without being asked

➢ **Propositional:** S predicates a future act A of H

➢ **Sincerity:** S wants H to do A

➢ **Essential:** The utterance e counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A

➢ **Preparatory 1**: *Can you tell me the time?*

➢ **Preparatory 2**: *Would you let me know the time?*

➢ **Propositional:** *Aren't you going to start your annotation?*

➢ **Sincerity:** *I wish you would answer me*

Summary of Semantics and Pragmatics

The big picture

➢ We can do many things with words

    ➢ Convey information
    ➢ Express attitudes
    ➢ Ask someone to do something
    ➢ Commit to doing something
    ➢ Change the state of the world (performatives)

➢ We do this by building layers of inference (pragmatics) on top of our understanding of words and how they go together (semantics)

    ➢ Words have meanings, that can be described through semantic relations
    ➢ Words describe referents and situations, and can also show the speaker's attitudes
    ➢ Relations between participants in a situation are linked by semantic roles
    ➢ Sometimes word meaning is non-compositional, it comes from constructions
    ➢ The scope of reference can be changed by quantifiers and modification

➢ A skilled writer can use words to tell a story, …

What you have learned and are still learning

➤ A gentle introduction to some of the basic semantic concepts

➤ Some practical experience in analysis

  ➤ Word meaning (projects 1 and 2)
  ➤ Sentiment and connotation (project 3)
  ➤ How to define concepts (project 3)
  ➤ Identifying non-compositional expressions (project 3)

➤ Holmes in popular culture, Copyright and authorship

➤ Still to come

  ➤ Detective fiction
  ➤ Reading Sherlock Holmes
  ➤ Watching Sherlock Holmes
  ➤ Holmes in translation

Speaking of copyright

➤ I would like to ask permission to use the results of your analysis in projects 1–3.

➤ This will help in further research into semantics, pragmatics and teaching.

➤ Technically, that you release the data into the public domain.

  ➤ You dedicate the work to the public domain by waiving all of your rights to the work worldwide under copyright law, including all related and neighboring rights, to the extent allowed by law.
  ➤ Anyone can copy, modify, distribute and use the data in performances, even for commercial purposes, all without asking permission.

➤ Your name will not be listed anywhere

➤ If you do not wish your data to be released, you can email me at any time until one week after the grades for the last project has been released and say you do not wish your data to be used. This has no effect on your grade.

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