

## Pragmatics (Seminar *Introduction to Linguistics*, Andrew McIntyre)

### 1. Pragmatics defined

- **Semantics** studies meanings that are intrinsic to particular lexemes and to syntactic and morphological processes that create complex expressions. By contrast, **pragmatics** studies meaning with reference to aspects of the (*extra-linguistic*) *context*, e.g. the speaker's intention or assumptions that the speaker and hearer have before the utterance.
  - Examples (from the area of *speech act theory*, not discussed in detail here):
    - *Illocutionary force* (distinction between statements, requests/commands, questions etc.) isn't always matched by grammatical mood (declarative, interrogative, imperative), so we need to deduce the *speaker's intention*. Hence it is pragmatic.
- (1) *There's an ink stain on the table.*
    - (i) statement (e.g. description of table)
    - (ii) request to remove stain
    - (iii) asking how to remove stain
  - (2) *Do you know the time?*
    - *Performative verbs* bring about certain non-linguistic situations when the sentences are uttered, so they are also studied in pragmatics
  - (3) *I sentence you to five years in prison.*
  - (4) *I hereby pronounce you husband and wife.*
  - (5) *I bet you \$10 that Mary will be late.*

### 2. Deixis

#### 2.1. Some basic deictic notions

- **Deixis** = the phenomenon whereby the reference of certain expressions is dependent on the extralinguistic context of the utterance (who said it when and where):
- (6) I will meet you here this afternoon at 3.
- **Deictic centre** = reference point of the text or utterance, by default the speaker/here/now.
  - **Remoteness**: Modern Standard English has **two-place** spatial & temporal deixis:
    - **Proximal**: near reference point: *here, now*
    - **Distal**: removed from reference point: *there, then*
  - Other languages/dialects have a three-place deictic system (cf. *here/there/yonder* in some Scottish varieties). Other languages have even more subtle distinctions.
  - The size of the proximal area is relative and depends on the context:
- (7) *Cuthbert is here.* [in this room? in this town? in this country? on this planet?...] ]

#### 2.2. Types of deixis

- **Spatial deixis**:
  - (8) Determiners: *this/that*
  - (9) Verbs specifying motion toward/away from speaker: *come/go*
  - (10) Adverbs (intransitive prepositions): *here/there; hither/hence, thither/thence*
- **Temporal deixis**:
  - (11) Adverbs/PPs: *now/then; this year/that year; at this/that point; yesterday; two days ago*
  - (12) Tense: present tense (proximal) vs. past/future tense (distal)
- **Personal deixis**:
  - (13) First person (Speaker: *I, we*)
  - (14) Second person (hearer: *you*)

- A. Some linguists (e.g. Huang 2007:133ff) see gestural uses of 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns (like *her* in (20)) as deictic, and the *anaphoric* use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns (like that in the sentence below) as non-deictic. Try to explain why anaphoric pronouns are not deictic.  
*I saw a woman sitting at the next table. She was reading a newspaper.*
- B. The distal forms *there, then* are more often anaphoric than are the proximal forms *here, now*. For a related reason, non-anaphoric *there* is more likely to be gestural than *here* is. Explain these facts.

- **Social deixis: The T/V distinction**: German *du/Sie*, French *tu/vous*, Middle English *thou/ye*; metaphorical proximity/distance on a social hierarchy (age, power, class) or in terms of familiarity/solidarity. Deictic because choice of forms depends on speaker.
- (15) All that he did was by thy instigation, thou viper; for I thou thee, thou traitor.  
[Said at Sir Walter Raleigh's trial, 1603]
- **Textual deixis**: metaphoric deixis in texts, often using spatial/temporal deictic words:
  - (16) [in book:] *I will shortly begin my defense of the Flat Earth Hypothesis. Note at this point that my arguments will be hard to follow unless we recall some points made in chapter 3. I will therefore briefly summarise that chapter here. There I argued that...*
  - (17) Listen to this: John said to Bob "Go fly a kite." He didn't like that.
  - (18) Look to the left, then to the right, then cross the road –in that order.
  - (19) *hereby, therefore* (=because of that), *the above, the former/latter*
- All of the above types of deixis can be expressed using linguistic means, but there is also **gestural deixis**, where it is expressed by a non-linguistic gesture (pointing, eye contact...):
  - (20) YOU are to work with HER.
  - (21) Put this candle HERE and that one THERE.
  - (22) [looking at map]: Neuchâtel is HERE, not HERE.
  - (23) It's THIS long/loud. [Indicating size with hands or volume with volume of voice]
  - (24) Horowitz played the passage THIS way. [demonstrates on piano/plays recording]
  - (25) When I say "now" start running. ... NOW! [temporal 'pointing']

- C. Identify a deictic and a non-deictic reading of the underlined expressions. You may have to think of special contexts to do this.
  1. *Gwendoline is to the left of Ethel in the photo.*
  2. *The book talks about quantum physics. This is discussed in chapter 3.*
  3. *I met this weird person at a party yesterday.*
  4. *Let's take the other road.*
  5. *An upright piano is in the middle of the room. The cat is behind the piano.*
  6. *When did they arrive, when did they go away and when did they return?*
  7. *Cynthia is upstairs.*
  8. *The president is going to hold a press conference today.*
  9. *There's a computer in the main office. This computer is not much good.*
  10. *When you write long texts, you should e-mail the files to yourself as a safety measure.*
  11. *There's the school. The university is opposite.*
  12. *The police found him in a local disco.*
- D. First person plural pronouns can be *inclusive* or *exclusive*. These have distinct forms in some languages but are mostly formally identical in English. Explain this with reference to the following examples.
  1. [cult member to journalist:] We believe that Plastic Cows guide human destiny.
  2. [Nine Inch Nails song:] *You and me, we're in this together now.*
  3. a. *Let us go home.* (ambiguous)      b. *Let's go home.*      c. *\*Let's take you home.*

### 2.3. Shifting deictic centre

➤ **Shifting deictic centre** (=deictic projection): Speakers pretend they are in another place/time, so expressions referring to deictic centre don't refer to place/time of speech.

(26) [from a textbook:] *Do exercise seven now!*

(27) *His opponent hit the ball into the net. Now he had won the tournament.*

➤ Shifting deictic centre can be a source of ambiguity:

(28) [on the phone]: *There's a hospital at the opposite end of town.*

(29) [letter from London to Sydney]: *We will try to visit you this winter.*

➤ Another example: *Come* is usable (a) of motion to speaker or hearer (at either utterance time or arrival time), or (b) of motion to a place normally occupied by speaker or hearer, whether or not they are there at utterance or arrival time (Huang 2007:161):

(30) *Should they come to your office now or stay here?*

(31) *Mary will come to our flat tomorrow, but neither of us will be there.*

(32) *\*Mary will come to our former flat tomorrow, but neither of us will be there.*

E. Look at examples (30)-(32), and decide whether *go* and *here* as flexible as *come*.

F. Can you think of contexts where the shifted deictic expressions below would be possible.

1. *I'm not here now.*                      2. *That's me there.*

G. Explain the following data (with Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of January as utterance time):

1. a. *\*this Tuesday / \*this Monday / \*this Wednesday*    b. *this Friday*

2. a. *this week/month/year/semester/academic year*    b. *\*this day*    c. *\*this fortnight*

3. a. *\*This Christmas we stayed at home.*                      b. *\*This Sunday we went fishing.*

H. Work out the difference between *bring* and *take* in the examples below.

1. *Can you {take/\*bring} me there?*

2. *{Take/\*Bring} this rubbish away, please!*

3. *Who {brought/\*took} him here?*

I. Can you reconcile the following sentences with the answer to the last question?

1. *I will {bring/take} it to you.*

2. *I will {bring/take} it to them.*

3. *You should {bring/\*take} it to me.*

4. *You should {bring/take} it to her.*

5. *She should {bring/\*take} it to you.*

6. *He should {bring/take} it to her.*

### 3. Presupposition

➤ **Presuppositions** are assumptions or beliefs assumed to be true by the speaker and hearer when a particular sentence is uttered. Presuppositions remain true even if the sentence is negated. (In the examples below, >> indicates a presupposition.)

(33) a. They realised that Ann was right.                      >> Ann was right.

b. They did not realise that Ann was right.                      >> Ann was right.

(34) a. The present king of France is bald.                      >> There is a king of France.

b. The present king of France is **not** bald.                      >> There is a king of France.

(35) a. I forgot to shut the window.                      >> I should have shut it.

b. I did **not forget** to shut the window.                      >> I should have shut it.

➤ Presuppositions are **triggered** by particular words (e.g. those underlined above).

J. **Factive** verbs (e.g. *realise* in (33)) presuppose that their complement clauses are true. Non-factive verbs (*think*) do not. Replace *realise* in (33) with the verbs below. Decide if they are factive or not.

*regret, decide, remember, believe, notice, claim, be certain, be disappointed*  
K. What presuppositions are triggered by the underlined words in the sentences below? If the answer is not obvious, consider the (non-)negated form of the sentence.

1. The areas around this town would be culturally interesting if cows could sing.

2. What Grandma blew up was not my car.

3. She didn't buy THAT book. [capitals indicate stress]

4. Gertrude called Egbert a conservative before HE insulted HER.

5. Who were you speaking to a minute ago?

6. It isn't the government that is trying to ruin my life.

7. Jane managed to get sick.

8. Clive rang before / after Louise left the office.

9. Fred stopped buying newspapers.

L. Identify (the triggers for) the unwanted presuppositions in the examples below. Reformulate them to eliminate the presuppositions.

1. [spokesman for a company:] *The papers spread rumours about the fact that our company exploits developing countries, but we say that they should not do so.*

2. CUTHBERT: *That you didn't ring me shows that you think I am a boring loser.*

FRANCINE: *That I didn't ring was not because you are a boring loser.*

3. [instructions for computer software:] *When you experience difficulties with this product, please visit our website.*

4. [letter to tax office:] *In your letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May, my attempt to claim fraudulent tax deductions was the illegal action which you accused me of.*

5. [Non-native speaker to customs official at airport:] *Why do you expect to find the heroin in my suitcase?*

M. What presupposition in the quotation below lays Bush open to the accusation of deliberate deception, given the fact that Bush's claim was based solely on letters between officials in Iraq and Niger which turned out to be forgeries?

*"The British government has learned that Saddam Hussein recently sought significant quantities of uranium from Africa."* [G.W. Bush, State of the Union address 2003]<sup>1</sup>

N. Answers to yes/no questions like the example below are considered a test for presuppositions. Why?

*Did you manage to put poison in anyone's drink?*

#### 3.1. The notion 'presupposition' compared to other notions

➤ **Entailment**: A proposition which follows from the meaning of another proposition:

(36) They raised the prices.                      →    The prices rose.

(37) Martha got a degree in medicine.                      →    Martha got a degree.

➤ **Presuppositions compared to entailments**: Entailments, unlike presuppositions, are affected by negation. This can be illustrated by comparing (38) with its negated variant.

(38) *I put the car in the garage.*

→    The car ended up in the garage.

>>    The car was not in the garage at the relevant time.

➤ **Presuppositions compared to implicatures**: Implicatures can be affected by negation (unlike presuppositions).

<sup>1</sup> Example from Wechsler, S. 2004. *The Pragmatics of Political Deception*. Handout. Available under <http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~wechsler/PoliticalDeceptionHandout.pdf>

### 3.2. Cancellation of presuppositions

- Presuppositions can (like implicatures) be cancelled if they contradict world knowledge, semantic entailments present in the context, or if they are explicitly denied.
- (39) He didn't *stop* buying newspapers because he's never bought one in his whole life.
- (40) He doesn't *regret* deceiving his wife because he never deceived her.
- (41) Now that John's love affairs are being discussed on TV, I bet John regrets being married – at least if he IS married.
- (42) If he doesn't own a car, the petrol prices won't make him regret buying one.

O. What is the difference in the presuppositions associated with *before* in the examples below? Speculate on what is responsible for the distinction.

1. She went to Africa before she finished her first novel.
2. She died before she finished her first novel.
3. She died before she reached the hospital.
4. We hope these lunatics will be voted out of office before they start World War III.

### 4. Implicatures

- **Implicature:** That which is implied rather than being said explicitly:

- (43) A: *Do you know the time?* B: *The bank is still open.*  
 (44) A: *Do you like my singing on the CD I lent you?*  
 B: *The guitar solo in the last song was good.*

#### 4.1. Grice's Maxims

- Philosopher H. Paul Grice proposed the *Cooperative Principle* and some *Maxims* which interact to explain many implicatures that exist.
- (45) **THE CO-OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE:** Make your 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.
- (46) **Grice's Maxims (=Gricean Maxims, conversational maxims)**
  - a. **MAXIM OF QUALITY:** Try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:
    - i. Do not say what you believe to be false
    - ii. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
  - b. **MAXIM OF QUANTITY:**
    - i. Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange
    - ii. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required
  - c. **THE MAXIM OF RELEVANCE:** Make your contributions relevant
  - d. **THE MAXIM OF MANNER:** Be perspicuous, and specifically:
    - i. Avoid obscurity
    - ii. Avoid ambiguity
    - iii. Be brief
    - iv. Be orderly
- The maxims are **not moral laws or commands**. They are assumptions about how a **cooperative** speaker will communicate. E.g. (46)c) means *Hearers assume (if there is no evidence to the contrary) that speakers are giving information relevant to the current discourse. So if something sounds irrelevant, hearers try to find a way to make it relevant.*

##### 4.1.1. Examples of implicatures generated by Grice's maxims

- Below +> indicates an implicature triggered by an expression.
- (47) *It snowed in Sydney in 1836.*  
 +> The speaker/writer believes the statement is true. (by QUALITY)

(Hence: *\*It snowed in Sydney in 1836 but I don't believe it did.*)

- (48) A: *Who did you have lunch with?* B: *George, Martha and Anna.*  
 +> Nobody else was present at the lunch. (by QUANTITY)
- (49) *Some people walked out of the concert.*  
 +> Not all people at the concert walked out. (by QUANTITY)
- (50) A: *What's the date?* B: *The 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2015.*  
 +> (Mentioning the year might trigger the implicature that B is stupid. (by QUANTITY))
- (51) A: *I wonder how much one of those computers would cost.*  
 B: *They cost about \$500.* / *??They cost \$489.95.*
- (52) A: *I have nearly run out of petrol.* B: *There's a garage round the corner.*  
 +> The garage is open now and sells petrol. (by RELEVANCE)
- (53) A: *Would you like some coffee?* B: *Coffee would keep me awake.*  
 +> Yes (unless speaker wants to go to sleep).
- (54) *Frankie read the newspaper and went home.*  
 +> He read the paper before going home. (by MANNER iv)

#### 4.1.2. Cases where maxims are not followed

- Distinguish different types of situations in which the maxims are not followed:
- A. Deliberate deception (uncooperative speaker lying or telling half-truth etc.)
- B. Clashes between maxims: one maxim violated to ensure that another is fulfilled.
 

(55) A: *When does the bookshop shut today?* B: *Some time between 6 and 8 p.m.*  
 +> B doesn't know exactly. (QUANTITY violated, so as not to violate QUALITY)
- C. Opting out of maxims using **hedges** (weakening expressions) like the following:
 

(56) a. *I'm no expert, but...*  
       b. *As far as I know...*  
       c. *I may be belabouring the obvious, but...*  
       d. *I don't know if I can explain general relativity clearly, but...*  
       e. *Oh, by the way...*  
       f. *I can't remember the other two names you're asking for.*  
       g. *I may be belabouring the obvious, but...*

P. Which of the expressions in (56) opt out of which maxim?

- D. **Flouting (exploiting)** maxims: infringement of maxims with three characteristics:
  - (i) The infringement is *blatant*. Speaker thinks hearer will notice the infringement.
  - (ii) The cooperative principle is being adhered to (despite appearances).
  - (iii) The infringement has the purpose of generating an implicature.

(57) [concert review: ] *Divina Cantalina produced a series of sounds which followed the score of Mozart's aria "Oh zittre nicht".*  
 +> The performance was lousy. (Using the underlined expression instead of *sang* flouts MANNER iii, implying that her vocalisations can't be called singing.)

(58) Job recommendation letter for a candidate for a physics professorship:  
*TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: Dr. Jones plays golf well, is always sober during his classes, and never hits his students hard. Yours truly...*  
 +> Jones is a bad candidate for the job. (To avoid violating QUALITY and being impolite by writing a negative reference, the writer violates RELEVANCE/QUANTITY. Reader assumes by QUANTITY that there are no relevant good qualities of Smith which could be mentioned.)

(59) [In job recommendation:] *You will be lucky if you can get John Jones to work for you.*

+> Jones is lazy. (Flouts MANNER by choosing an ambiguous way of saying that employers would be lucky if Jones become their employee.” Reader assumes writer would have avoided this MANNER violation had Jones not been lazy.)

- (60) A: *John’s wife is such a stupid cow.* B: *It’s nice weather, isn’t it.*  
 +> A’s comment should not be discussed. (Flouts RELEVANCE)
- (61) a. *War is war.* b. *It’s not over till it’s over.* c. *If they win, they win.*  
 (Such tautologies flout QUANTITY. Hearer tries to find an informative implicature.)
- (62) Some phenomena relying on the flouting of QUALITY:  
 a. Irony b. Metaphor  
 c. Hyperbole d. Understatement

#### 4.1.3. Some properties of implicatures

- Implicatures can be **cancelled** by explicitly contradicting them:  
 (63) a. Many people hated the film. (+> Not all people hated it.)  
 b. Many people hated the film. In fact, everybody hated it.
- It does not sound redundant to express information that would otherwise be assumed by the hearer on the basis of an implicature:  
 (64) Some people left, but not everyone.
- Sentences with synonymous expressions trigger the same implicatures (unless the implicatures arise by the maxim of MANNER).  
 (65) {Somebody/Someone left}. +> Not everybody left.  
 (66) He married {three times/thrice}. +> Not four times.

Q. Identify conversational implicatures in the examples below, and explain which maxims trigger them and how they do so.

- Cecilia: Are you going to walk to university?  
Max: No, I’m going to fly there in a spaceship.
- Basil: What does the chicken soup taste like?  
Francine: It tastes like chicken soup.
- David: I’m going to tell that skinhead to stop being an obnoxious moron.  
Katie: I didn’t know you like hospital food.
- George: Where’s the sleeping bag?  
Sarah: It’s either in the garage or the cellar.
- Gertrude: Are you coming to the party tonight?  
Arthur: I have an assignment due tomorrow.

R. Use the maxims to explain what is odd or uncooperative about the following exchanges:

- Nurse: Have you been drinking alcohol in the hospital?  
Patient: If I did not opt for a negative answer, I would be extricating myself from a situation in which I might not be able to escape the accusation of mendacity.
- Jane: Why did you hit him?  
Cyril: Because I wanted to hurt him.
- Anna: I’m injured. It would help if you call me an ambulance.  
Mervyn: Ok, You’re an ambulance.
- Frank: I want to buy this book. Do you have \$10 on you?  
Jill: No, I don’t have \$10 on me. I have 50.
- Colleen: When is your birthday?  
Stuart: It was on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March this year.
- Boss: Who didn’t come to the office when I was away yesterday?

Secretary: Julius Caesar, Egbert of Wessex, Leonardo da Vinci, and I could, um, name lots of others, but it would take quite a while.

- S. The implicature in (i) below is usually attributed the QUANTITY maxim (e.g. Huang, p. 28, Levinson, p.106). Why is this questionable, at least given the formulation of the maxim?  
 (i) *She has three children.* +> She has no more than three children.  
 (ii) *If you have three young children, the state pays for special childcare services.*
- T. While *three* in (i) above would normally be taken to mean ‘three and no more than’, *three* can sometimes mean ‘three or more’, as in (ii) above. Can you think of other contexts where implicatures of the type seen in (i) do not hold? Can you think of a context where *three* might mean ‘three or less’?

#### References

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