Pragmatics

LING001

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Meaning in Language

- Semantics: Study of **literal meaning of words and sentences**.
  - First, a (very) brief review.
- Pragmatics: Study of **intended (speaker)** meaning.
  - Speech acts
  - Conversational implicature

Semantics, Quick Review

- **Semantic** meaning = **literal** meaning of words and sentences.
- We can understand the meaning of a sentence that we've never heard before, e.g.

An adventurous armadillo googled the origin of the internet.

→To know the meaning of this sentence is knowing what the world would have to look like in order for the sentence to be true..

Semantics, Quick Review

- Semantic meaning is **rule governed**
  - Computed from the meaning of individual words & morphemes + compositional rules of the grammar:

Blue trainer : Adj + N = NP

Pragmatics

- Pragmatics: Study of **intended (speaker)** meaning.
  - Speech acts
  - Conversational implicature

Speech Acts

- People don't just use language to state facts.
- Rather, use language for a number of communicative goals.
- Speech Acts : roughly, what we *do* with language.

Speech Acts

1. ASSERTION : *John likes cats.*
2. QUESTION : *Does John like cats?*
3. ORDER/REQUEST: *Be nice to your cat!*

Attested in most of the worlds languages.

Speech Acts

- Three basic types of **direct** speech acts + corresponding **syntax**:

Speech Act (Pragmatics)	Syntactic Construction	Example
Assertion	Declarative	*John likes cats.*
Question	Interrogative	*Does John like cats?*
Order/Request	Imperative	*Be nice to your cat!*

Speech Acts

- Corresponding **indirect** speech acts, with syntactic embedding:

Speech Act	Syntax	Example
Indirect Assertion	Embedded Declarative	***I said that*** *John likes cats.*
Indirect Question	Embedded Interrogative	***I asked if/whether*** *John likes cats?*
Indirect Order/Request	Embedded Imperative	***I told you to*** *be nice to your cat.*

- *Why use indirect speech acts?*

Speech Acts

Politeness:

- *Pass the salt. vs. Would you mind passing the salt?*

Expressing uncertainty / source of evidence:

- *You'll do well on your test tomorrow. vs.*
  I'm sure you'll do well on your test tomorrow.
- *It's going to snow tomorrow. vs.*
  I heard from John that it's going to snow tomorrow.

> --- Main point of utterance: it's going to snow.
> --- This claim is only as good as the reported source of evidence (John's word)

Shows us that speaker meaning, and it's interaction with the syntax, is more complex than just stating facts and requesting information…

Pragmatics

- Pragmatics: Study of **intended (speaker)** meaning.
  - Speech acts
  - Conversational implicature

Conversational Implicature

- Speaker meaning is not just complex,
- It's also **systematic** and (to some extent) **predictable**, given a set of **conversational principles.**

Conversational Implicature

A classic example:

> John: *Will Mary be at the meeting this afternoon?*
>
> Lisa: *Her car broke down.*

How is Lisa's statement answering John's question?

Conversational Implicature

How is Lisa's statement answering John's question?

      John: *Will Mary be at the meeting this afternoon?*
      Lisa: *Her car broke down.*

Literal meaning (John utters): α = M's car broke down.
Inferred meaning (Lisa understands): β = M won't be at the meeting.

      Question: How do we get from α to β? (*Uniform inference!*)

Conversational Implicature

John: Will Mary be at the meeting this afternoon?

Lisa: Her car broke down =   α : Mary's car broke down.

                                                           β : Mary won't be at the meeting.

- **How does Lisa get to β from hearing John utter α?**
- **Through some rather complex reasoning:**

  - L infers that J doesn't know for sure that M won't be at the meeting (or he would have said so by answering her question directly).
  - However, J knows---and offers the information, that M's car has broken down, and thus, that M probably won't have any way of getting to the meeting.
  - Thus, L infers that J thinks that M won't be at the meeting.

Conversational Implicature

- Fortunately for us linguists, we can model this reasoning!
- Using Grice's (1975) theory of how implicatures arise
  - = how speaker meaning is calculated from sentence meaning.

Conversational Implicature

Grice's theory of how implicatures are calculated:

A. The Cooperative Principle:

The assumption that speakers customarily adhere to, and assume that their interlocutors also adhere to, the following rules (or **maxims**) of conversation:

1. **Quantity**: give the right amount of information;
2. **Quality**: try to say only what is true;
3. **Relevance**: make what you say relevant to the topic at hand;
4. **Manner**: be clear (or, say things in a way that makes sense).

Conversational Implicature

Grice's theory of how implicatures are calculated:

B. From the interaction of the following 3 factors:

1. The **literal meaning** of the sentence uttered.
2. Possibly certain features of the **context**.
3. The assumption that the speaker is obeying the rules of conversation, i.e. the **Cooperative Principle**.

Let's look at a few examples!

Conversational Implicature

The Cooperative Principle, **Quality** in action:

> A. *Tehran's in Turkey, isn't it, teacher?*
>
> B. *And London's in Armenia, I suppose.*   (Levinson, 1983)

- **Literal meaning** : London is in Armenia. (Which is false)
- Reasoning from the **Cooperative Principle**:
  1. B is **flouting** (i.e. blatantly violating) the assumption of **Quality**:
  2. B draws a comparison between A's question of whether Tehran is in Turkey, and the obviously false statement 'London is in Armenia'.
  3. Thus, B is implying that A's question is clearly false.

Conversational Implicature

The Cooperative Principle, **Quantity** in action:

       A. *Do you have 10 bucks that I can borrow?*

       B. *I have 9.*

- **Literal meaning** : B has 9 dollars. (Compatible with B having $10.)
- Reasoning from the **Cooperative Principle**:
  1. A assumes that if B is cooperative and gives the right amount (**quantity**) of information, given A's question.
  2. I.e. if B had had 10 dollars, B should have said so (being cooperative).
  3. However, B didn't say "I have 10". Hence, A infers that B only has 9.

Conversational Implicature

The Cooperative Principle, **Relevance** in action:

       A. *Where is the roast beef?*

       B. *Well, the puppy sure looks happy.*

- **Literal meaning** : The puppy looks happy.
- Reasoning from the **Cooperative Principle**:
  1. A assumes that if B is cooperative and provides **relevant** information in order to answer A's question.
  2. A infers that the reason that the dog's happiness is relevant to the question of the whereabouts of the roast beef, is that the dog ate the roast beef.

Conversational Implicature

The Cooperative Principle, **Manner** in action:

      A. *What happened?*

      B. *When the dog came in, the cat left.*

- **Literal meaning** : The dog came in and the cat left, at apx. the same time.
- Reasoning from the **Cooperative Principle**:
    1. A assumes that B is cooperative and has some reason for mentioning the two events together, in this particular **manner**.
    2. For instance, that the cat left as a *result* of the dog entering.

Conversational Implicature

Recognizing an implicature:

Implicatures (unlike literal meanings) are **cancelable** and **context-dependent.**

Conversational Implicature

Cancelability

Some of the students passed the test.   Implies : **not all**

Entails : **at least one**

We can felicitously cancel the implied meaning:
*Some of the students passed the test. In fact, they **all** did.*

But not the literal (entailed) meaning (gives rise to a contradiction):
*#**Some** of the students passed the test. In fact, **none** of them did.*

Conversational Implicature

Context-dependence:

    A. *Where is the roast beef?*

    B. *Well, the puppy sure looks happy.*

"The dog looks happy" doesn't conventionally mean 'the puppy ate the roast beef'. This meaning only arises in this context, i.e. A's question.

Conversational Implicature

Context-dependence:

A. *Did the dog toys that we ordered arrive yet?*

B. *Well, the puppy sure looks happy.*

Different inferences in different contexts!

Conversational Implicature

NB: We don't satisfy these demands all the time.

For instance, we might:
- Violate or opt-out of the Cooperative Principle (e.g. lie),
- Flout the Cooperative Principle (i.e. blatantly violate, with a communicative purpose).

Conversational Implicature

Subsequent work has developed and criticized aspects of Grice's theory. Nevertheless, the basic idea is still influential, namely that:

Speakers calculate the intended meaning of an utterance, based on the literal meaning of the utterance, together with specific assumptions about how people behave in conversation (saying things that are mostly relevant, true, sufficient to get the message across, and so on).

Pragmatics

Main focus today: the study of **intended (speaker)** meaning.
- Speech acts
- Conversational implicature

Before we conclude:
- Pragmatics as the study of how we use language to **frame events**, or make **reference to entities** in particular, systematic ways.

Pragmatics and sentence-meaning

Referring to entities:

      a. <u>Mary</u> walked into the room.

      b. <u>A woman</u> walked into the room.

      c. <u>The woman</u> walked into the room.

      d. <u>She</u> walked into the room.

      e. <u>The woman I met at the party</u> walked into the room.

      f. <u>My doctor</u> walked into the room.

The noun phrases in (a)-(f) can all be used to denote the same individual (**semantically equivalent**).

Used to in different contexts/to frame the individual in different ways (**pragmatically non-equivalent**).

Pragmatics and sentence-meaning

Framing events:

      a. John kicked the ball.

      b. It was John who kicked the ball.

      c. The one who kicked the ball was John.

      d. The ball was kicked by John.

The sentences in (a)-(d) all describe the same event (**semantically equivalent**).

Used to in different contexts/to talk about the event in different ways (**pragmatically non-equivalent**);

Not implicatures, since:
    a.   Not cancellable;
    b.   Obligatory, given the compositional rules of the syntax.