



Chapter 10:

Pragmatics



Introduction to Linguistics

LANE 321

Pragmatics



- In the previous chapter, we talked about:
 - Conceptual meanings
 - Lexical relationships
- There are other aspects of meaning that depend more on:
 - Context
 - The communicative intentions of speakers.
- Communication clearly depends on not only recognizing the meaning of words in an utterance, but recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances.
- The study of what speakers mean is called **pragmatics**.

Invisible meaning



What does this mean?!

Fall Baby Sale



Invisible meaning



- Are they selling babies?
- We understand the message although the word 'clothes' is not there.

Context



There are different kinds of context

1. Linguistic context (co-text)

- The **co-text** of a word is **the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence.**
- The surrounding co-text has a strong effect on what we think the word probably means.
 - Bank (a homonym)
 - I need to withdraw some cash from the bank.
 - Most of Ancient Egypt's historical sites are located along the banks of the Nile River.

Context



2. Physical context



The physical location will influence our interpretation

Deixis



- Some very common words cannot be interpreted unless the physical context of the speaker is known.
- **Examples:** *here* and *there*, *this* or *that*, *now* and *then*, *yesterday*, *today* or *tomorrow*, as well as pronouns such as *you*, *me*, *she*, *him*, *it*, *them*.

Deixis



- Some sentences are impossible to understand if we don't know who is speaking, about whom, where and when.
 - *You'll have to bring it back tomorrow, because she isn't here today.*
- Out of context, this sentence is vague.
- It contains a large number of expressions that rely on knowledge of the immediate physical context for their interpretation
- These expressions are technically known as **deictic expressions**, from the Greek word **deixis**, which means “pointing” via language.

Deixis



Deixis (deictic expressions): Using words such as this or here as a way of “pointing” with language.

- We use deixis to point to:
 - things (*it, this, these boxes*)
 - people (*him, them, those idiots*) [Person deixis]
 - location (*here, there, near that*) [Spatial deixis]
 - time (*now, then, last week*) [Temporal deixis]

All these deictic expressions have to be interpreted in terms of which person, place or time the speaker has in mind.

Reference



Reference: an act by which a speaker/writer uses language to enable a listener/reader to identify someone or something

- We can use:
 - Proper nouns: (*Chomsky, Ahmed*)
 - Nouns in phrases: (*the cat, a writer, my friend, the war*)
 - Pronouns: (*he, she, it*)
- These words can be used to refer to many entities in the world
- We refer to things we're not sure what to call them
 - *That blue thing*
 - *That icky stuff*
- We invent references: *Mr. Kawasaki* (p. 131), *Miss Google*.

Inference



- A successful act of reference depends more on the listener's ability to recognize what we mean than on the listener's dictionary's knowledge of the word we use.
- We can use names associated with things to refer to people
 - *Where's the caesar salad sitting?*
 - *He's sitting by the door.*
- We can use names associated with people to refer to things
 - *Can I borrow your Chomsky? Sure it's on the table*
 - *We saw Shakespeare in London.*

An inference is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant.

Anaphora



- We usually make a distinction between
 - introducing new referents (*a puppy*)
 - and referring back to them (*the puppy, it*)
- *We saw a funny home video about a boy washing **a puppy** in a small bath.*
- ***The puppy** started struggling and shaking and the boy got really wet.*
- *When he let go, **it** jumped out of the bath and ran away.*
- In this type of referential relationship,
 - The 1st mention is called **antecedent**. (*a puppy/ a boy, a small bath*)
 - The 2nd (subsequent) referring expression is an example of **anaphora** ("referring back"). (*the puppy/ it/ the boy/ he/ the bath*)
 - **Anaphora**: a subsequent reference to an already introduced entity.

Anaphora



- The connection between an **antecedent** & an **anaphoric expression** is created by use of:
 - A pronoun (**it**)
 - Repetition of the noun with *the* (**the puppy**)
 - Another noun that is related to the antecedent in some way (**The little dog** ran out of the room).
- The connection between antecedents and anaphoric expressions is often based on inference, as in these examples,
 - *We found **a house** to rent, but **the kitchen** was very small.*
 - *I caught **a bus** and asked **the driver** if it went near the downtown area.*

Presupposition



- *Why did you arrive late?*
 - Presupposition = you arrived late.
- *When did you stop smoking?*
 - Presupposition 1 = the speaker supposes that you used to smoke.
 - Presupposition 2 = the speaker supposes that you no longer smoke.
- We design our linguistic message on the basis of assumptions about what our listeners already know.
- What a speaker assumes is true or known by the listener can be described as a **presupposition**

Presupposition



- Questions like this, with built-in presuppositions, are very useful devices for interrogators or trial lawyers.
 - *Okay, Mr. Buckingham, how fast were you going when you ran the red light?*
- Negation test
 - *My car is old*
 - *My car isn't old*
 - The underlying presupposition = (I have a car)/ It remains true although the two sentences have opposite meanings. (**constancy under negation**)

Speech acts



- Speech acts (e.g. requesting/ commanding/ questioning/ informing)
- We can define a **speech act** as **the action performed by a speaker with an utterance.**

e.g.

- *I'll be here at five.*

You are not just speaking, you are performing the speech act of 'promising'

Direct and indirect speech acts



- We usually use certain syntactic structures with the functions listed beside them in the following table

	Structures	Functions
<i>Did you eat the pizza?</i>	Interrogative	Question
<i>Eat the pizza (please)!</i>	Imperative	Command (Request)
<i>You ate the pizza.</i>	Declarative	Statement

- When an **interrogative structure** such as Did you..?, Are they..?, Can we....? is used with the **function** of a **question**, it is described as a **direct speech act**.
- When we don't know something and we ask someone to provide the information, we usually produce a direct speech (Can you ride a bicycle?)

Direct and indirect speech acts



- *Can you pass the salt?*
- Is it the same syntactic structure as (Can you ride the bicycle?)
- Does it have the same function that (Can you ride the bicycle?) has (i.e. asking about your ability)?
- No, it's a request not a question. (**Indirect speech act**)

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Direct and indirect speech acts



- Whenever one of the structures in the set is used to perform a function other than the one listed beside it on the same line, the result is an indirect speech act.
- *You left the door open* (What structure? What function?)
- *You left the door open* (for someone who has just come in and it's really cold outside.)
- (= close the door) request but without using an imperative structure?

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Direct and indirect speech acts



- It is possible to have strange effects if one person fails to recognize another person's indirect speech act.
 - Consider the following scene. A visitor to a city, carrying his luggage, looking lost, stops a passer-by.

VISITOR: Excuse me. Do you know where the Ambassador Hotel is?

PASSER-BY: Oh sure, I know where it is. (and walks away)
 - The passer-by is acting as if the utterance was a direct speech act instead of an indirect speech act used as a request for directions.
- *Could you open that door for me?* Function = request not question
- Why do we use the indirect speech?
- It's more polite. *Open that door for me!*

Politeness



- In the study of linguistic politeness, the most relevant concept is ‘face’
- Your face, in pragmatics, is your public self-image. This is the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize.

Politeness can be defined as **showing awareness of and consideration of another person’s face.**

Politeness



If you say something that represents a threat to another person's self image, that is called a **face-threatening act**.

- e.g. *Give me that paper!*

behaving as if you have more social power than the other person. If you don't actually have that power (your mom, a military officer), then you are performing a face-threatening act.

If you say something that lessens the possible threat to another's face, it can be described as a **face-saving act**.

- Indirect speech act (*Could you pass me that paper?*) removes the assumption of social power.

Negative and positive face



- **Negative face:** the need to be independent, free from imposition
- A face-saving act that emphasizes a negative face will show concern about imposition:
 - *I'm sorry to bother you...*
 - *I know you're busy but...*
 - *If you're free,...*
- **Positive face:** the need to be connected, to be a member of the group
- A face-saving act that emphasizes a person's positive face will show solidarity and draw attention to a common goal:
 - *Let's do this together...*
 - *You and I have the same problem, so*

References



Yule, G. (2010). *The study of language*. (4th ed.)
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Homework: All study questions/ pp. 137

Thank you