
Pragmatics (cont'd)

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Non-Literal Meaning

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- Most of language use is abbreviated and indirect, inference is crucial.

A: Do you have coffee to go?

B: Milk and sugar?

A: Do you know what time it is?

B: The train to Paris is already gone.

A: And what time would you like to leave Pittsburgh?

B: Uh hmm, I don't think there's many options for non-stop.

A: Right. There's there non-stops today.

- Language users adhere to certain conventions that govern cooperative behavior
 - Speakers (generally) observe these conventions
 - Hearers assume that speakers (generally) observe them

Cooperative Principle (P. Grice)

- Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.
- Maxims of conversation (Gricean Maxims):
 - Maxim of Quality: Be truthful.
 - Do not say what you believe to be false.
 - Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
 - Maxim of Quantity
 - Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)
 - Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
 - Maxim of Relation: Be relevant.
 - Maxim of Manner: Be clear.
 - Avoid obscurity of expression
 - Avoid ambiguity
 - Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
 - Be orderly.

Gricean Maxims: Examples

- Quality

A: When does the lecture start?

B1: At ten.

B2: I think at ten.

B3: I don't know.

- Quantity

B4: I know that the lecture that you are asking about starts later than the other lectures, before lunch, to be precise, it starts between 10:00 and 10:01 a.m. local time, that is CET, when the teacher starts speaking.

- Relevance

B5: Today there is chocolate pudding for dessert!

- Manner

B6: At 4 o'clock New York time.

Conversational Implicatures

- Inferences based on assumptions about what the speaker is trying to achieve and their observation of the maxims of conversation, taking into account the literal meaning of the utterance and the particular circumstances.

A: Where is Bill?

B: Bill's car is parked in front of Susan's house.

CI: Bill is at Susan's place.

- Can be cancelled (unlike logical entailments)

A: He left it there last night because he had been drinking.

- “Enhance” the meaning of an utterance in context (unlike presuppositions, which are “preconditions” for an utterance to make sense at all)
- Maxim adherence or flouting (e.g., irony, metaphor, changing topic)

Conversational Implicatures: Examples

- Quality:
JFK during his visit in Berlin: Ich bin ein Berliner.
- Quantity
A: What color does the flag have?
B: It is white.

A: Some politics are corrupt.
B: Are there politics who are not corrupt?
- Relevance
Tea advertisement: It's the taste.
A: Why didn't you eat your lunch?
B: It's the taste.
- Manner
A: Peter yelled at his boss and got fired.
B: Peter got fired and yelled at his boss.

Scalar Implicatures

- Conversational implicatures based on the Quantity maxim, following a particular pattern: the use of an expression e_1 which is weaker than a possible expression e_2 according some entailment scale s implicates that e_2 does not hold.

A: How many students came?

B: Three.

Scale: none, one, two, three, four, ...

SCI: Not more than three students came.

A: How did Peter do on the exam?

B: He passed.

Scale: fail, pass, very good

SCI: Peter did well enough to pass, but not very good.

A: What shall we do tonight?

B: We can go out for dinner or go to the movies.

Scale: or, and

SCI: B is proposing either dinner or movies, not both.

Presuppositions

- “Sincerity/appropriateness conditions” or “sense conditions”: inferred propositions that must be true in the given context for an utterance to be appropriate or to make sense at all

Peter sold his car.

Peter’s wife likes ice-cream.

Peter regrets that he sold his car.

Peter stopped smoking.

The sun is shining again.

Would you like to have more tea?

Who ate the cookies?

- Can sometimes be cancelled (like implicatures, but unlike entailments) but not always; sometimes presuppositions are in fact entailed

Peter did not sell his car. He in fact did not own any.

If Peter is married, his wif likes ice-cream.

- Must hold in context “before” the meaning of an utterance is added
Accommodation: “context repair” to make a presupposition to hold (but not always possible)

?He smokes.

?Peter saw the bike.

?Peter is also a bachelor.

Speech Acts

Speech Acts (Austin)

- Speech acts are the things that people do by using language:
Every utterance performs an act, it does something, e.g., it can change someone's beliefs, it can move someone to act, or it can even change the state of the world

I apologize.

I object!

I promise to make dinner.

“performatives”

The earth is revolving around the sun.

What time is it?

Can you please pass the salt?

“non-performatives”

- Austin's speech act types/levels:
 - Locutionary act: the act of uttering a sentence with a particular semantic content
 - Illocutionary act: the act of asking, informing, promising, etc.
 - Perlocutionary act: the result/effect on feelings, thoughts or actions of the hearer

Classification of Speech Acts (Searle)

Assertive	S commits to sth being the case	Comment, suggest, swear, boast, conclude
Directive	S attempts to get H do sth	Ask, order, request, beg, invite, advise
Commissive	S commits to future course of action	Promise, plan, vow, bet, oppose
Expressive	S expresses psychological state	Thank, apologize, welcome, deplore
Declarations	S changes world	Resign, name, fire

Summary

- Conversational maxims
- Conversational implicatures
- Presuppositions
- Speech acts