



Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2020

Lecture 13: Introduction to Pragmatics

16/06/2020, Christian Bentz



Updated Schedule (2020)

09/06/2020	Lecture 12	Further Topics in Semantics: Evidentiality
11/06/2020		Corpus Christi (Fronleichnam)
16/06/2020	Lecture 13	Introduction Pragmatics
18/06/2020	Lecture 14	Discourse Representation Theory I
23/06/2020	Lecture 15	Discourse Representation Theory II
25/06/2020	Lecture 16	Implicatures
30/06/2020	Lecture 17	Presupposition
02/07/2020	Lecture 18	Speech Acts I
07/07/2020	Lecture 19	Speech Acts II
09/07/2020	Lecture 20	Test Exam
14/07/2020	Lecture 21	Further Topics in Pragmatics I
16/07/2020	Lecture 22	Further Topics in Pragmatics II
21/07/2020	Lecture 23	Summary: Pragmatics
23/07/2020	Exam	

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Q&A

Tutorial 6

- ▶ *Sentences involving **might** should be interpreted as having epistemic modality, since deontic modality would normally require **may**.*

– This seems generally true according to dictionary entries.¹ Though note that the Cambridge Dictionary also gives *Might I speak to you for a few minutes, please?*, as a possible usage of *might*,² and this is a deontic example.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

¹<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-german/may>

²<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english-german/might>



Overview

Literature

Section 1: Introduction to Pragmatics

Three Levels of Meaning

Section 2: The Scope of Pragmatics

Historical Note

Definitions of Pragmatics

Section 3: Concepts and Frameworks

Implicature

Presupposition

Speech Act Theory

Summary

References

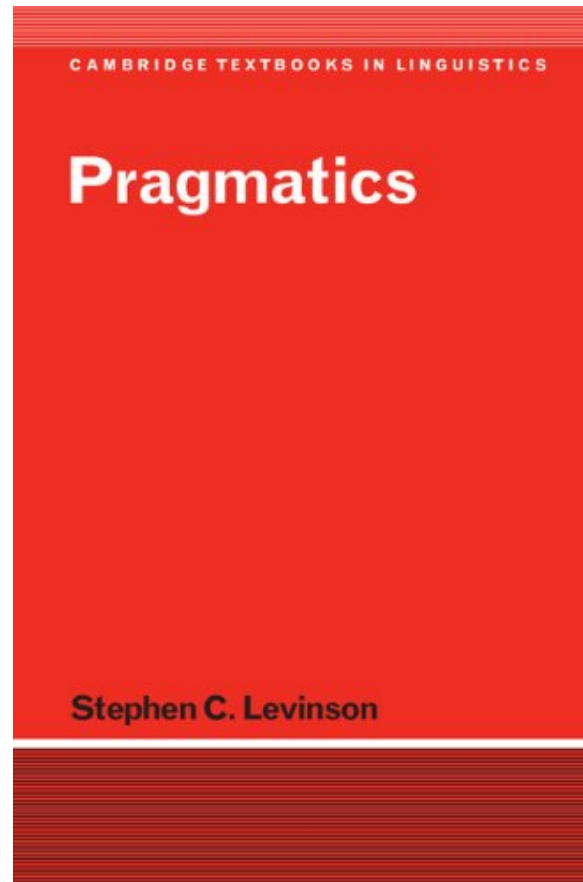


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Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

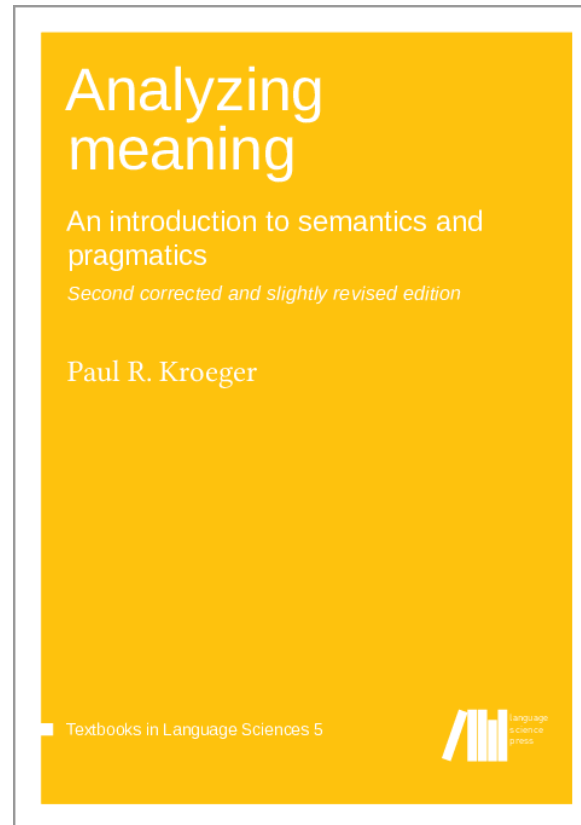
Summary

References



Pragmatics: Implicature and Speech Acts

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Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

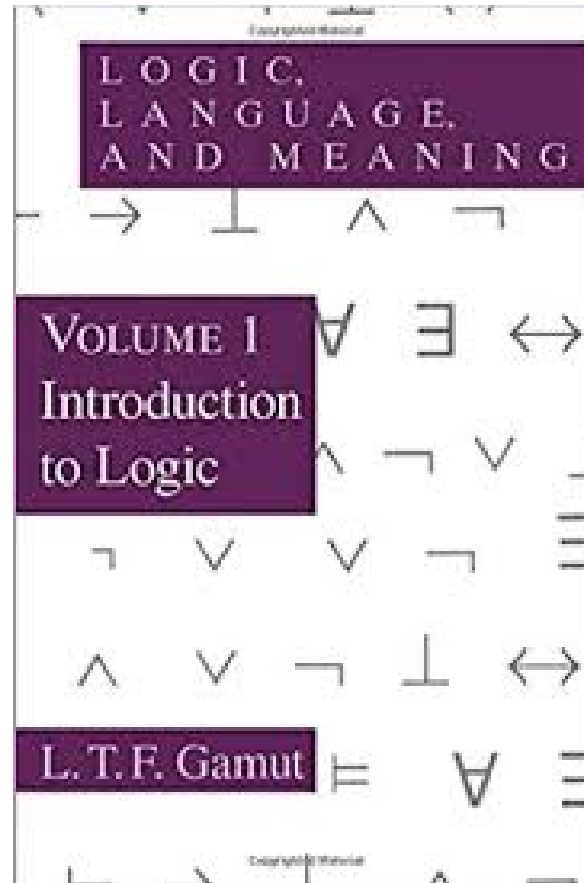
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download at: <http://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/231>



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Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



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Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Section 1: Introduction to Pragmatics



Three “levels” of meaning

1. **Word meaning:** Meaning assigned to individual words.
Example: *kick*; *bucket*
2. **Sentence meaning:** Meaning derived via combination of word meanings (compositional). “The term **sentence meaning** refers to the semantic content of the sentence: the meaning which derives from the words themselves, regardless of context.”
Example: KICK(j,b), literally “John kicks the bucket.”
3. **Utterance meaning** (“speaker” meaning): “The term **utterance meaning** refers to the semantic content plus any pragmatic meaning created by the specific way in which the sentence gets used.” Another definition is: “The totality of what the speaker intends to convey by making an utterance.”
Example: *John dies*.

Kroeger (2019). Analyzing meaning, p.5.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Three “levels” of meaning

Teochew (Southern Min Chinese, Sino-Tibetan)

- (1) Lw chya? pa bɔy?
you eat full not.yet
“Have you already eaten?”

Sentence meaning: “Have you already eaten or not?”, i.e. a request for information.

Utterance meaning: Greeting like “hello” or “how are you” in English.

Kroeger (2019). Analyzing meaning, p. 5-6.

Literature

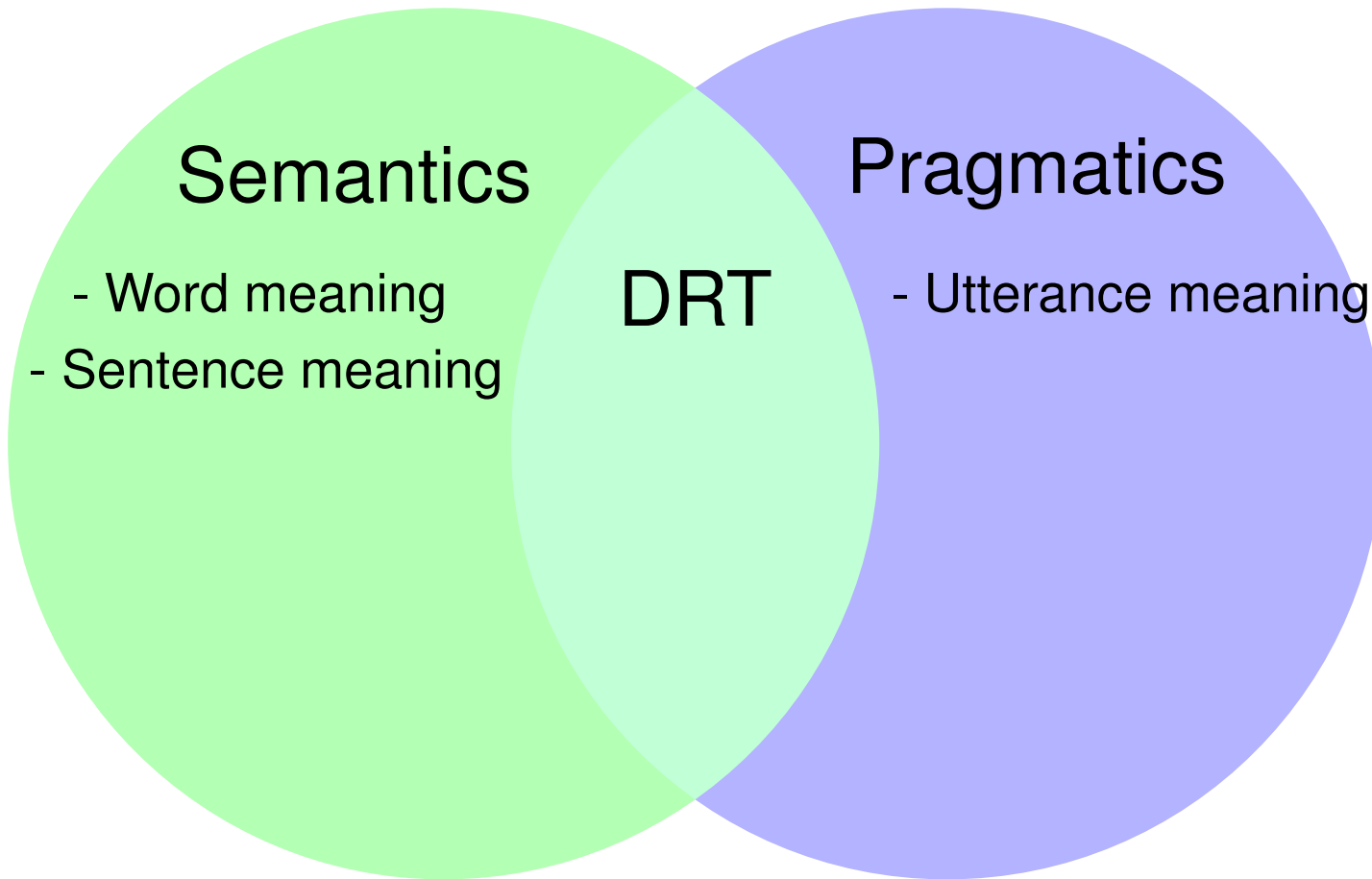
Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

DRT: Discourse Representation Theory



Section 2: The Scope of Pragmatics



Historical Note

“The modern usage of the term **pragmatics** is attributable to the philosopher Charles Morris (1938), who was concerned to outline (after Locke and Peirce) the general shape of a science of signs, or **semiotics** (or semiotic as Morris preferred). Within semiotics, Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry [...].”

1. **syntactics (or syntax)**: the study of “the formal relation of signs to one another”,
2. **semantics**: the study of “the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable” (their designata),
3. **pragmatics**: the study of “the relation of signs to interpreters”.

Levinson (1983), p. 1, citing Morris (1938).

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

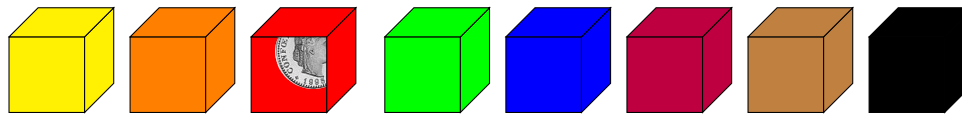
Summary

References



Remember the Box Game

“Where is the coin?”



“In the **red** box.”

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

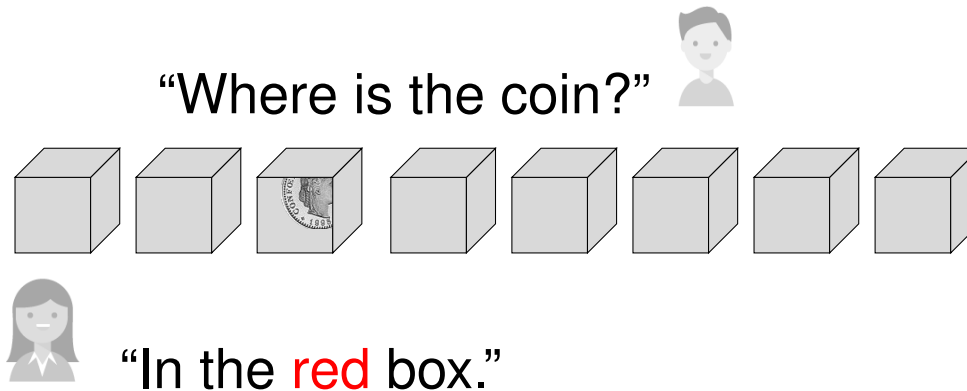
Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

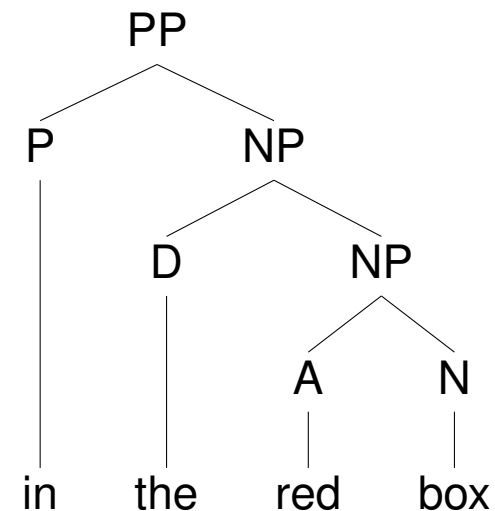
References



Syntax in the Box Game



In a strict definition of **syntax**, we are purely interested in how the signs (e.g. words) relate to one another, i.e. how they are **arranged with reference to one another**. How they relate to the objects, and how they are interpreted by the speaker and hearer is secondary – though it is still considered relevant how they are processed in human brains.



Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

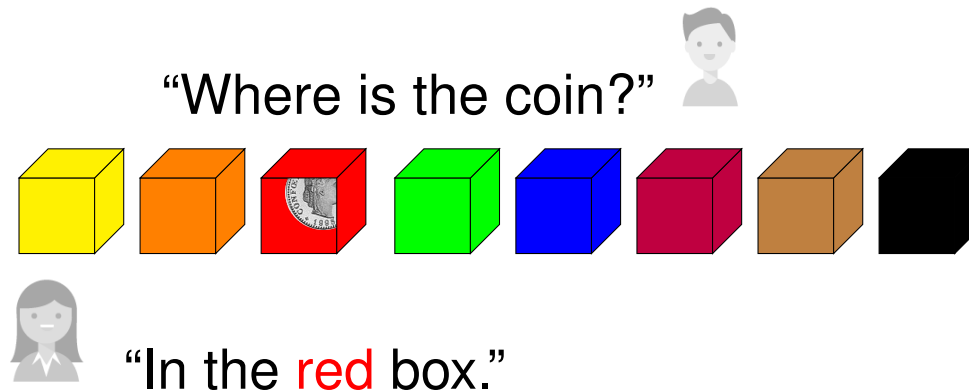
Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Semantics in the Box Game



In **semantics**, we are interested **how signs map to the objects** they (are supposed to) refer to. In formal semantics, this is modelled via translation into a logical language, and a definition of a model world according to which the truth of statements can be evaluated. Note that this is **independent of the interpretations of the speaker and hearer** based on contextual considerations.

First Order Predicate Logic

“The coin is in the red box.”

$\phi \equiv Icb \wedge Rb$

Ixy: x is in y

Rx: x is red

c: the coin

b: the box

Valuation function: $V_M(\phi) = 1$

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

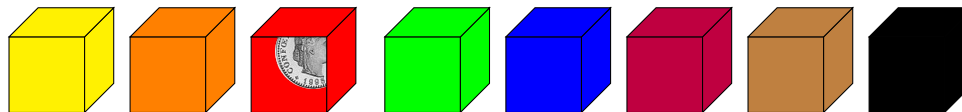
Summary

References



Semantics in the Box Game

“Where is the coin?”



“In the **red** box.”

Pragmatics goes beyond the pure connection of signs (syntax), the truth-conditional (or other type of) mapping of signs to objects (semantics), by taking into account further contextual information that speaker and hearer might harness when formulating and interpreting utterances.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



How exactly is Pragmatics defined?

“[...] the applicability [of the distinction between syntax, semantics, and pragmatics] to the description of natural languages, in contrast to the description or construction of logical calculi, is, to say the least, uncertain.”

Levinson (1983), p. 6, citing Lyons (1977a), p. 117.

“*Pragmatics* is one of those words (*societal* and *cognitive* are others) that give the impression that something quite specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning.”

Levinson (1983), p. 6, citing Searle et al. (1980), p. viii.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Possible Definitions of Pragmatics

- ▶ Anomaly Definition
- ▶ Functional Definition
- ▶ Context Definition
- ▶ Grammaticalization Definition
- ▶ Truth-Conditional Definition
- ▶ Inter-Relation Definition
- ▶ Appropriateness/Felicity Definition
- ▶ List Definition

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Anomaly Definition

“One possible definition might go as follows: pragmatics is the study of those principles that will account for why a **certain set of sentences are anomalous**, or not possible utterances.”

Levinson (1983), p. 6-7.

- (2) ??Come there please!
- (3) ??Aristotle was Greek, but I don't believe it.
- (4) ??Fred's children are hippies, and he has children.

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ The set of pragmatic anomalies are here presupposed rather than explained.
- ▶ It is sometimes in fact possible to use these utterances in particular contexts.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Functional Definition

“Another kind of definition that might be offered would be that pragmatics is the study of language from a **functional perspective**, that is, that it attempts to explain facets of linguistic structure by reference to non-linguistic pressures and causes.”

Levinson (1983), p. 7.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ Failure to distinguish pragmatics from other functionally oriented fields such as *psycholinguistics* and *sociolinguistics*.



Context Definition

“Pragmatic theories [...] explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers in working out the **correlation in a context of a sentence token with a proposition**. In this respect, a pragmatic theory is part of **performance**.”

Levinson (1983), p. 8, citing Katz (1977), p. 19.

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ It is hard to draw a boundary between **context-independent** grammar (competence), and **context-dependent** grammar (performance).

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Example: Korean Honorifics

(5) pi ka o-n-ta
rain NM come-IN-DC
'It is raining.' (plain)

(6) pi ka w-a
rain NM come-INT
'It is raining.' (intimate)

(7) pi ka o-ney
rain NM come-FML
'It is raining.' (familiar)

(8) pi ka o-o
rain NM come-BLN
'It is raining.' (blunt)

(9) pi ka w-a.yo
rain NM come-POL
'It is raining.' (polite)

(10) pi ka o-p-ni-ta
rain NM come-AH-IN-DC
'It is raining.' (deferential)

Velupillai (2012), p. 373-374, citing Sohn (2001), p. 269.

Note: Korean distinguishes six levels of politeness. Depending on who a speaker talks to, they will use different forms of a given verb. A feature that would generally be assumed to belong to the **conversational context** (i.e. knowledge of the status of an addressee in relation to the speaker) has become **part of the grammar**.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Grammaticalization Definition

“Pragmatics is the study of those **relations between language and context** that are **grammaticalized**, or encoded in the structure of a language.”³

Levinson (1983), p. 9.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ While this definition would (probably) include, for instance, the study of *presuppositions* and *speech acts*, it would exclude *conversational implicatures*, which, however, are generally seen as a fundamental concept treated by pragmatics.

³The term *grammaticalization* is used here in the broad sense covering the encoding of meaning distinctions in the lexicon, morphology, syntax, and phonology of languages.



Truth-Conditional Definition

“Pragmatics has as its topics those aspects of the meaning of utterances which cannot be accounted for by straightforward reference to the **truth conditions** of the sentences uttered.”

Pragmatics = Meaning - Truth Conditions (1)

Levinson (1983), p. 12, citing Gazdar (1979), p. 2.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ The scope of pragmatics then varies considerably depending on the semantic theory adopted.
- ▶ Since this is a definition by exclusion, i.e. “non-semantics” is pragmatics, it fails capture the unifying characteristics of pragmatic phenomena.



Inter-Relation Definition

“[...] the term *pragmatics* covers both **context-dependent aspects of language structure** and **principles of language usage** and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure [...] pragmaticists are specifically interested in the **inter-relation of language structure and principles of language usage.**”

Levinson (1983), p. 9.

“Pragmatics is the study of the **relations between language and context** that are basic to an account of language understanding.”

Levinson (1983), p. 21.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Some Advantages:

- ▶ Recognition of the fact that pragmatics is concerned with **inference** (i.e. given an utterance, presuppositions, implicatures etc. have to be inferred by the hearer).
- ▶ It does not draw a distinction between **grammatically encoded/unencoded**.⁴
- ▶ It includes important aspects about the **principles of language usage**.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

Some Disadvantages:

- ▶ It would include the study of the entirety of the **speaker's world knowledge**.
- ▶ It requires a clear **definition of pragmatically relevant context**, which is hard to delimit.

⁴This is an advantage according to Levinson given that there is controversy over whether, for instance, presuppositions are encoded in linguistic forms.



Appropriateness/Felicity Definition

“Pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to **pair sentences with the contexts** in which they would be **appropriate.**”

Levinson (1983), p. 24.

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ This would lead to a perfect overlap between pragmatics and sociolinguistics (if the latter is construed as a theory of communicative competence).
- ▶ It would require a large number of pragmatic theories for different languages, and even for subgroups of language communities, as appropriateness conditions vary widely.
- ▶ Speakers sometimes use language in an inappropriate manner on purpose.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



List Definition

“Pragmatics is the study of deixis (at least in part), implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and aspects of discourse structure.”

Levinson (1983), p. 27.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

Problems with this definition:

- ▶ It provides no clear criteria for inclusion/exclusion of further topics that might/should become relevant.



Section 3: Concepts and Frameworks



Conversational Implicatures

Sentence meaning (semantic content according to a truth-conditional framework) might widely differ from **utterance meaning** (the entirety of what the speaker intends to convey by using an utterance). Thus, the hearer needs to draw an inference to bridge this gap. This kind of inference is called **conversational implicature**.

Kroeger (2019), p. 139.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

- (11) Arthur: Can you tell me where the post office is?
Bill: I'm a stranger here myself.



Presupposition

“As a first approximation, let us define **presupposition** as information which is linguistically encoded as being part of the **common ground** at the time of utterance. The term common ground refers to everything that both the speaker and hearer know or believe, and know that they have in common.”

Kroeger (2019), p. 40.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References

(12) ??Fred’s children are hippies, and he has children.

(13) “Take some more tea,” the March Hare said to Alice, very earnestly. “I’ve had nothing yet,” Alice replied in an offended tone, “so I can’t take more.”

Kroeger (2019), p. 40, citing *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll.



Speech Acts

Speech act theory deals with so-called **performatives** about which John L. Austin famously wrote:

- ▶ “they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and
- ▶ the uttering of the sentence is, or is part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something.”

Austin (1962), *How to do things with words*, p. 5.

(14) *I do* (take this person as my lawful husband/wife).

(15) I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth* (uttered when smashing a bottle against the stem).

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Summary



Summary

- ▶ There are several different ways of defining the **scope of pragmatics**.
- ▶ Some definitions are clearly **dispreferred** by Levinson (1983), e.g. the *Grammaticalization Definition* and the *Appropriateness Definition*.
- ▶ Some of the more **promising** are the *Inter-Relation Definition* and the *Truth-Conditional Definition* (or variants thereof).
- ▶ However, a **fully satisfactory definition** is currently not available (though this is a problem shared with other scientific fields).
- ▶ Typical phenomena addressed in pragmatic theories are **conversational implicature, presupposition, and speech acts**.

Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



References



References

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Literature

Section 1:
Introduction to
Pragmatics

Section 2: The
Scope of
Pragmatics

Section 3:
Concepts and
Frameworks

Summary

References



Thank You.

Contact:

Faculty of Philosophy

General Linguistics

Dr. Christian Bentz

SFS Wihlemstraße 19-23, Room 1.24

chris@christianbentz.de

Office hours:

During term: Wednesdays 10-11am

Out of term: arrange via e-mail