EBERHARD KARLS
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**Faculty of Philosophy**
General Linguistics

# Semantics & Pragmatics SoSe 2023

## Lecture 13: Introduction to Pragmatics

**20/06/2023, Christian Bentz**

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# Origanizational Note: Exam

- **Exam in presence** (27/07/2023 at 12am Room 0.01).
- We will allow a so-called **cheat-sheet**, i.e. one page of DIN A4 (front and back) with your notes, which you can use in the exam.


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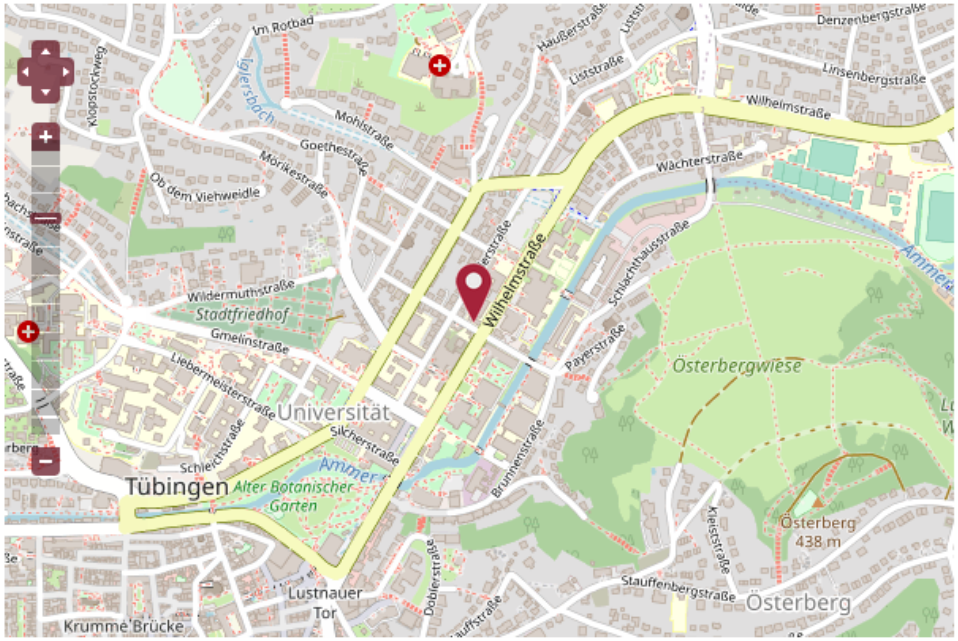
**Zentrales Prüfungsamt Wilhelmstraße 19**




**Prüfungsanmeldung Lehramt B.Ed. / M.Ed. und B.A. / M.A.-Studiengänge**

Die Prüfungsanmeldung in Alma ist für alle Leistungen verpflichtend!

**Beginn: 05. Juni 2023**

**Ende: 10. Juli 2023**

**Prüfungsabmeldung:**

Online in Alma bis **16. Juli 2023**

Die Frist für die Abmeldung (Rücktritt) ist abhängig vom Studiengang und der Prüfungsordnung geregelt.

**Hinweis**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Section 1: Introduction to Pragmatics
- Three Levels of Meaning

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- Historical Note

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- Implicature
- Presupposition
- Speech Act Theory

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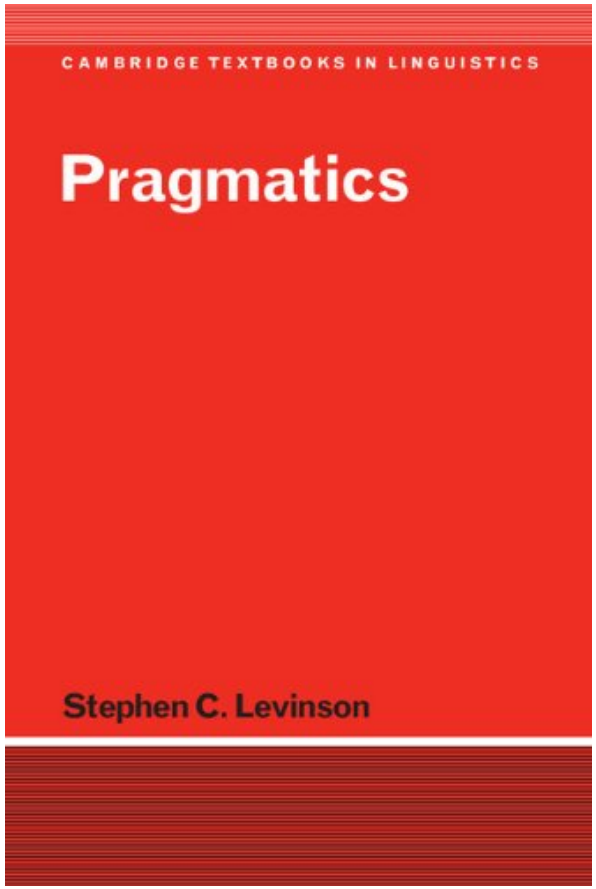
# Literature

# Pragmatics: Historical Overview

Levinson, Stephen C. (1983). *Pragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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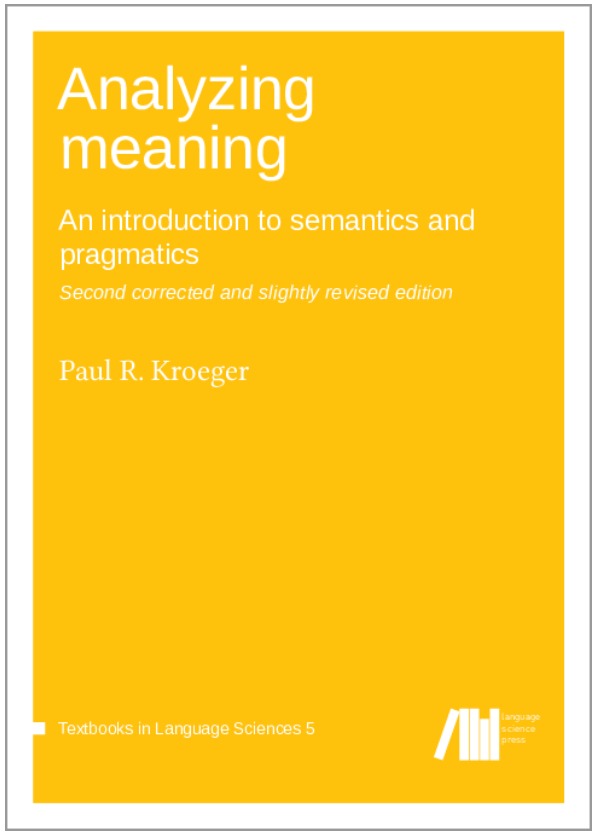
# Pragmatics: Implicature and Speech Acts

Kroeger, Paul (2019). *Analyzing meaning: An introduction to semantics and pragmatics. Second corrected and slightly revised edition.* (Textbooks in Language Sciences 5). Berlin: Language Science Press.

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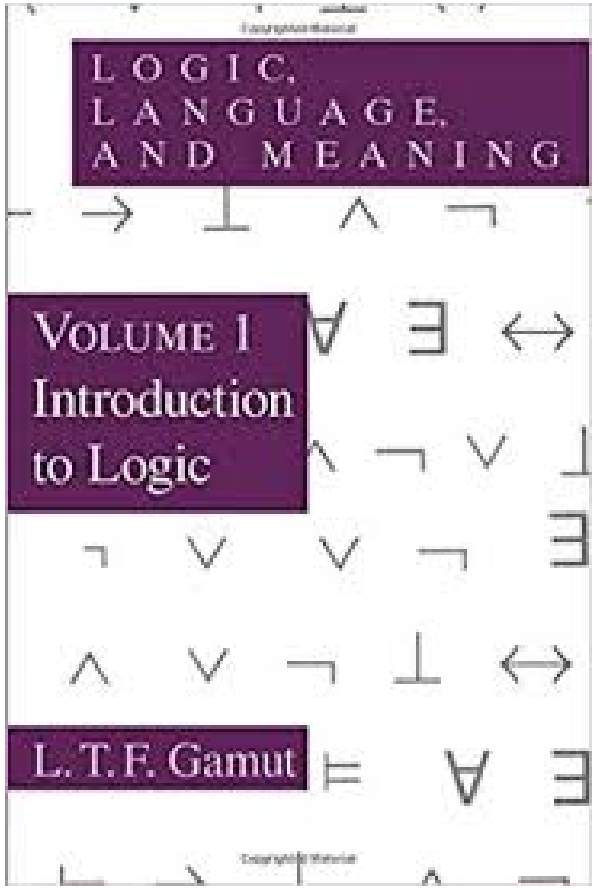
# Pragmatics: Brief Introduction (Chapter 6)

Gamut, L.T.F (1991). *Logic, Language, and Meaning. Volume 1: Introduction to Logic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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# Further Literature

Austin, John L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Birner, Betty J. (2013). *Introduction to Pragmatics*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Geurts, Bart, & David Beaver (2007). Discourse Representation Theory. In: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N.Zalta. CSLI, Stanford University. Online at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/discourse-representation-theory/.

Grice, Paul H. (1975). *Studies in the way of words*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

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# 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: K(j,b) in typed logic, 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.

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# Three “levels” of meaning

Teochew (Southern Min Chinese, Sino-Tibetan)

(1) Lɯ chyaʔ 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. Note: The expected reply is “I have eaten”, even if this is not factually true.

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

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## Discussion Point

Context: You meet a colleague on the floor. They ask in English: *How are you*?

- What is the *sentence meaning* and the answer directly adressing it?
- What is the *utterance meaning* and the answer/behavior expected?

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## Discussion Point

Context: You meet a colleague on the floor. They ask in German: *Wie geht es dir*?

- What is the *sentence meaning* and the answer directly adressing it?
- What is the *utterance meaning* and the answer/behavior expected?

Are there differences when English or German is used?

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# Discussion Point

Context: You sit on a train by the window and the person next to use says to you: *Isn't it cold today*?

- What is the *sentence meaning* and the answer directly adressing it?
- What is the *utterance meaning* and the answer/behavior expected?

Are there differences when English or German is used?

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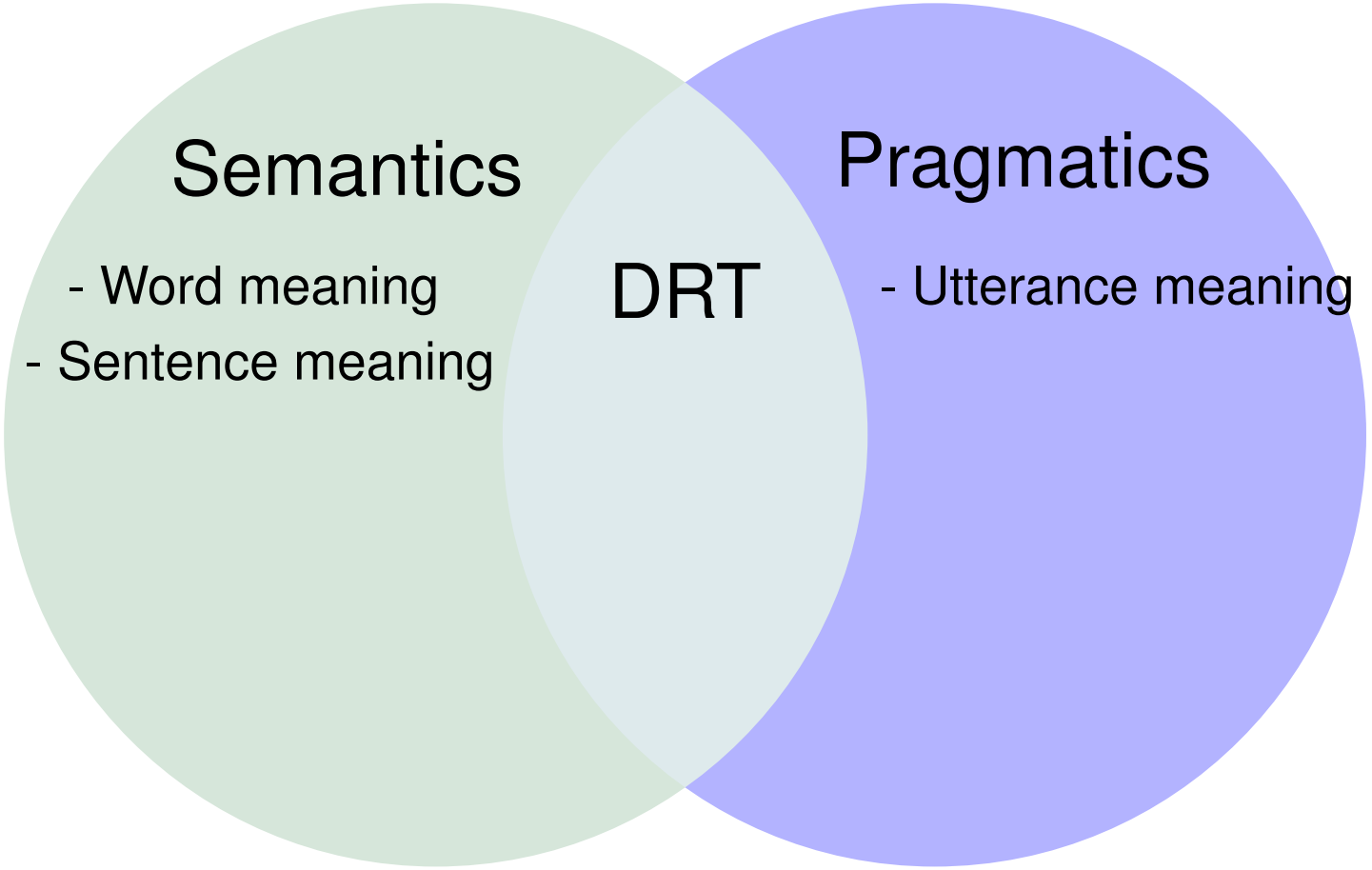


DRT: Discourse Representation Theory

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# 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).

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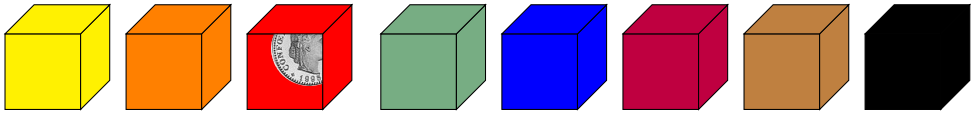
# Remember the Box Game

"Where is the coin?"



"In the red box."

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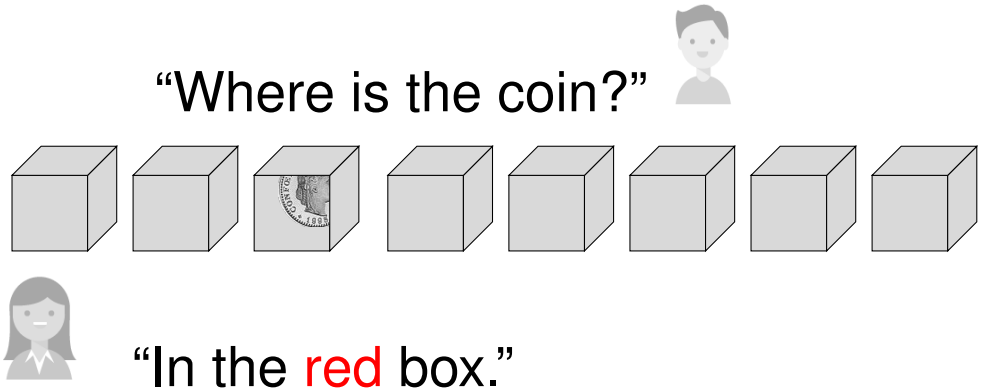
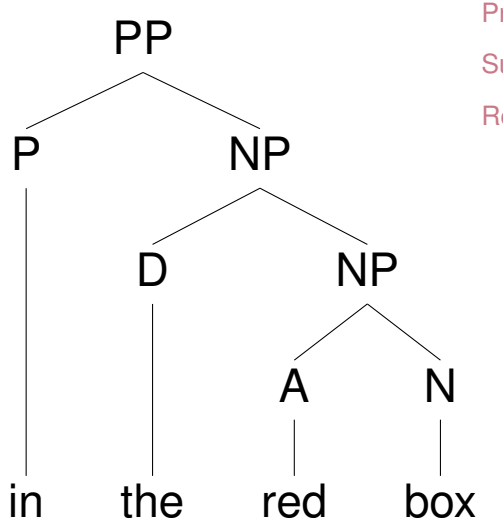
# Syntax in the Box Game




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.

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## Discussion Point

What if the girl said "*In the box red"? What does the asterisk here refer to?

- A convention over a population which can change over time?
- Or is there some deeper cognitive root of grammaticality?

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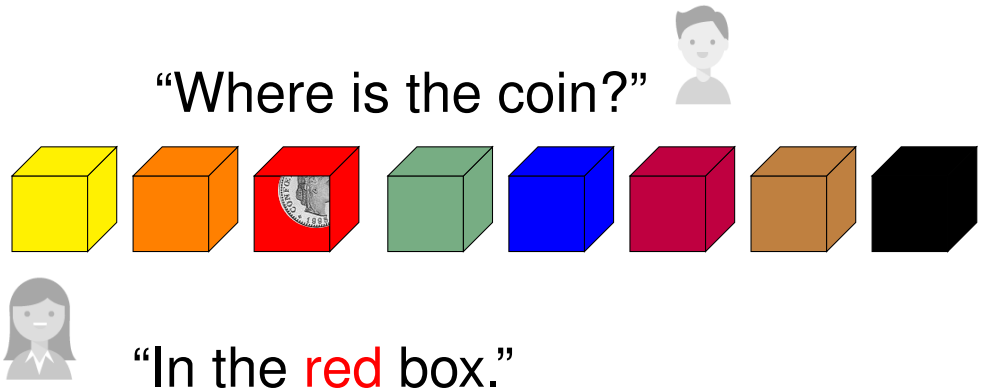
# Semantics in the Box Game




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.”

$\phi \equiv \text{Icb} \wedge \text{Rb}$

Ixy: x is in y
Rx: x is red
c: the coin
b: the box

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

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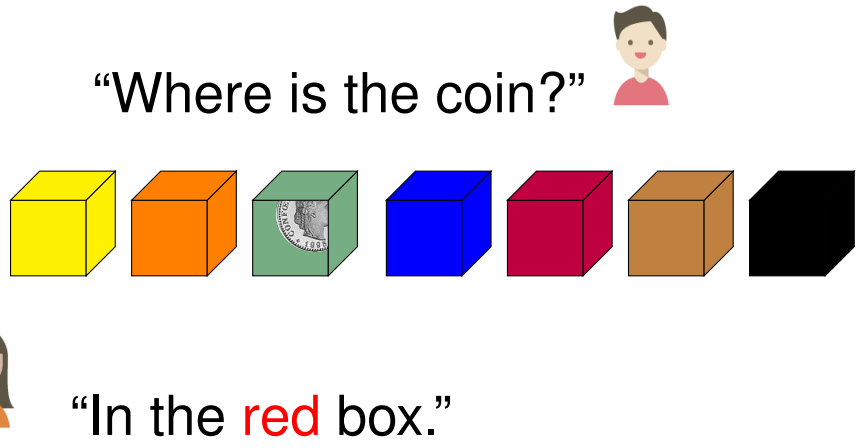
# Pragmatics in the Box Game




**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. This is especially important when a “standard interpretation” of the utterance fails.

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# 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.

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

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# 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.

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(3) # Fred's children are hippies, and he has children.

(4) "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 Caroll.


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# 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.

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

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


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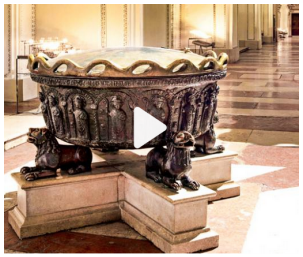
CNN US Crime + Justice Energy + Environment Extreme Weather Space + Science

# A pastor baptized people for decades using one wrong word. Now those are all considered invalid

By Chuck Johnston and Steve Almasy, CNN

Updated 1705 GMT (0105 HKT) February 15, 2022



**(CNN) —** A Catholic priest has resigned after a church investigation found he performed invalid baptisms throughout most of his more than 20-year career, according to Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Phoenix.

Father Andres Arango, who performed thousands of baptisms, would say, "We baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." But Olmsted explained the words "We baptize" should have been "I baptize" instead.

"The issue with using 'We' is that it is not the community that baptizes a person, rather, it is Christ, and Him alone, who presides at all of the sacraments, and so it is Christ Jesus who baptizes," Olmsted wrote in a message to parishioners posted last month.

The error also means that because baptism is the first of the sacraments, some people will need to repeat other sacraments, according to the diocese webpage for frequently asked questions. CNN has reached out to the diocese for comment on other sacraments.

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# Section 4: Defining Pragmatics

# 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.

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# Possible Definitions of Pragmatics

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

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# 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.

(7) ??Come there please!

(8) ??Aristotle was Greek, but I don't believe it.

(9) ??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.

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# 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.

**Problems with this definition:**

- Failure to distinguish pragmatics from other functionally oriented fields such as *psycholinguistics* and *sociolinguistics*.
- The term *functional* itself seems rather void.

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## Discussion Point

Complex gender and classification systems are often seen as “non-functional” and as morphological “ornamentation”?

- What could be structural, psycholinguistic, social functions of gender systems?

Can you imagine a linguistic structure/convention which is genuinly non-functional?

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# 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).

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# Example: Korean Honorifics

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

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

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

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

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

(15) 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**.

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# Grammaticalization Definition

"Pragmatics is the study of those **relations between language and context** that are **grammaticalized**, or encoded in the structure of a language."[1]

Levinson (1983), p. 9.

**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.

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

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# 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."

$$\text{Pragmatics} = \text{Meaning} - \text{Truth Conditions} \quad (1)$$

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

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**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 to capture the unifying characteristics of pragmatic phenomena.


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# 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 sociolinguistcs (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.

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# 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.

## Problems with this definition:

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

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# 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.

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## 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**.[2]
- It includes important aspects about the **principles of language usage**.

## 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.

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

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# Summary

# Summary

- Typical phenomena addressed in pragmatic theories are **conversational implicature**, **presupposition**, and **speech acts**.
- 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 hard to come by (though this is a problem shared with other scientific fields).

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# Thank You.

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