

Pragmatics

Lecture 4

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1. Pragmatics: meaning in interaction

Pragmatics – the study of the principles which govern language in use.

Pragmatics – the study of a speaker's intentions and meanings.

sentence meaning / speaker meaning

– Are you going to Sue's party tonight?

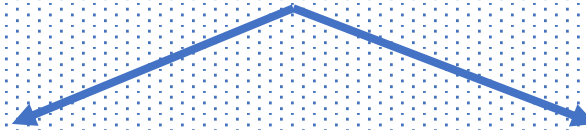
– I have to work late.

the speaker meaning and the sentence meaning are different

Speakers frequently mean much more than their words actually say.

in the early 1980s

the most common definitions of
pragmatics



meaning in use

meaning in context

two
competing
approaches
to pragmatics

speaker meaning

- favoured by those who take a social view of the discipline
- puts the focus on the **producer of the message**
- obscures the fact that the process of interpreting involves moving between several levels of meaning

utterance interpretation

- favoured by those who take a broadly cognitive approach
 - focuses too much on the **receiver of the message**
 - ignores the social constraints on utterance production
-

3 levels of meaning

- **Abstract** meaning
- **Contextual** meaning (utterance meaning)
- **Force of the utterance** (speaker's intention)



handout

a piece of printed information provided free of charge, especially to accompany a lecture or advertise something

a gift of money, clothing, or food, which is given free to poor people

Abstract meaning



Nina Hyams



Robert Rodman



Victoria Fromkin

2 kinds of
context

Linguistic context – discourse that precedes the phrase or sentence to be interpreted.

Amazingly, he already loves her.



Its linguistic meaning:

Something male and animate has arrived at a state of adoration of something female and animate, and the speaker finds it astonishing.

without context, that's as far as it goes

- Linguistic knowledge accounts for speakers' ability to combine phonemes into morphemes, morphemes into words, words into sentences.
- There are some common words that can't be interpreted if we don't know the context.
- This is **deixis**.



- **Person deixis:** *me, you, him, her, us, them, that woman, those girls*
- **Spatial deixis:** *here, there, beside you, near that, above your head*
- **Temporal deixis:** *now, then, last week, later, tomorrow, yesterday*

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

2 kinds of
context

Situational context

the speaker, hearer, any third parties present

+

their beliefs

+

their beliefs about what the others believe

+

the physical environment, the subject of
conversation, the time of day

Contextual meaning / Utterance meaning

‘*a sentence-context pairing*’, the first
component of speaker meaning

'father of pragmatics'

• Force of the utterance

- the term **force** refers to the speaker's *communicative intention*

- *Force* ⇒ introduced by **John Langshaw Austin**

the 2nd component of speaker meaning



Is that your car?

Is the speaker expressing admiration or scorn?

Is it a complaint that your car is blocking the drive?

Is the speaker requesting a lift into town?

notions
within the
scope of
pragmatics

✓ **Inference**

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

✓ **Reference**

an act by which a speaker uses language to enable a listener to identify something.

what a speaker/writer assumes is true or known by a listener/reader

✓ **Presupposition**

2. Speech acts

are concerned with the *use* of language rather than with the *meaning* of language

2.1. *John
Langshaw
Austin as an
'ordinary
language
philosopher'*

A **speech act** is the act of using language.

A **speech event** is a situation that entails verbal interaction.

units of analysis
in pragmatics

A **speech community** is a group of people who share certain norms of verbal behavior.

Examples of speech acts

- **Expressives** convey emotions:

I was totally overwhelmed.

- **Directives** make orders or requests:

Tell him I said “hi”!

- **Comissives** promise or threaten:

I am not wearing this.

- **Declaratives** provide information:

Her name is Yule.



HOW
TO DO
THINGS
WITH
WORDS
J. L. AUSTIN

Second Edition

J. O. URMSON AND MARINA SBIS

- **J. L. Austin** was a philosopher at Oxford University in the 1940s and 1950s.
 - His pupil ⇒ **H .P. Grice**
‘ordinary language philosophers’
 - In 1960 Austin died.
 - The lectures were brought together by J. O . Urmson.
- “**How to do things with words**” is a rather informal book, very easy to read.



What is ordinary language philosophy?

- **Austin** : people do not just *use language* to say things, but to *do things / perform actions*.
- introduced a theory of **illocutionary acts**
- examines what kinds of things we do when we speak

‘performative hypothesis’



2.2. The performative hypothesis

the term 'performative verbs'

(i) *I drive a white car.*

(ii) *I apologize.*

(iii) *I name this ship The Albatross.*

(iv) *I bet you £5 it will rain.*

adverb *hereby* between subject and verb

self-referential
self-verifying
non-falsifiable

*I **say**, I **protest**, I **object**, I **apologize***

*I **deny**, I **promise***

*I **bet** you 5 dollars the Yankees win.*

*I **withdraw** my complaint.*

*I **fine** you 100\$ for possession of oregano.*

*I **dare** you to step over this line.*

*I **declare** the meeting open.*

*I **plead** not guilty.*

*I **vote** to abolish vivisection.*

*I **pronounce** you husband and wife.*

*I **thank** the audience for their attention.*



Austin's performative hypothesis collapsed

- (i) There is no formal (grammatical) way of distinguishing performative verbs from other verbs.
- (ii) The presence of a performative verb does not guarantee that the specified action is performed.
- (iii) There are ways of 'doing things with words' which do not involve using performative verbs.

2.3. The meaning of speech acts

- A **speech act** has two meanings
the surface meaning and **the real/intended meaning**
- arises in context
- is construed by interlocutors based on contextual clues, the shared knowledge of the world and shared cultural expectations

utterance's surface meaning is

- **locutionary content**

intended meaning is

- **illocutionary force**


effect the utterance has on the listener is

- **perlocutionary act/force**



TABLE 5.1 Locutionary Content and Illocutionary Force of Some Conversational Formulae

Conversational routine	Context	Locutionary content	Illocutionary force
How are you?	Meeting	Information question	Greeting
What's up?	Meeting	Information question	Greeting
Is Sybil there?	Telephone conversation	Information question	Request



The following utterances illustrate different ways of performing the **speech act of requesting** someone to close the door

- *Shut the door!*
 - *Could you shut the door?*
 - *Did you forget the door?*
 - *Put the wood in the hole.*
 - *Were you born in a barn?*
 - *What do big boys do when they come into a room, Johnny?*
-

3. Implicatures

People are not totally explicit.

Convey far more than their words mean.

H. P. Grice distinguished two different sorts of implicature:

conventional implicature

conversational implicature

*conventional
implicature
conversational
implicature*

- **common**

both convey an additional
level of meaning

- **differ**

in the case of **conventional
implicature** the same
implicature is always
conveyed regardless of
context.

in the case of **conversational
implicature**, what is implied
varies according to the
context of utterance.

Conventional implicature

is not dependent on the conversation

is inherent to the lexical item or syntactic structure that gives rise to the implicature

examples of conventional implicatures:

but, even, therefore, yet

*... she was cursed with a stammer, unmarried **but** far from stupid.*

Conversational implicature

arises only in a particular *context* of utterance

- *Are you going to Fred's Party tonight?*
- *I have to work late.*

4. The Cooperative Principle

- **Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.**



5. The Conversational maxims

In '**Logic and conversation**' Grice proposed four maxims:

Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence (not give information that is false or that is not supported by evidence).

Relation: Be relevant (says things that are pertinent to the discussion).

Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity). Be orderly.



6. Theories of politeness

- **6.1. Delimiting the concept of politeness**



- Politeness as a real-world goal
- Deference
- Register
- Politeness as a surface level phenomenon
- Politeness as an illocutionary phenomenon



Politeness as a real-world goal

desire to be pleasant to others has no place within pragmatics.

Linguists have access only to **what speakers say** and to **how their hearers react.**



Deference

is frequently equated with politeness, particularly in discussions of Japanese.

- respect we show to other people by virtue of their higher status, greater age, etc.
- Politeness is a more general matter of showing consideration to others.



Register

- the way in which the language people speak or write **varies** according to the type of situation
- has little to do with politeness and little connection with pragmatics, since we have no real choice about whether or not to use formal language in formal situations.
- choice of register has little to do with the strategic use of language





- *Politeness as a surface level phenomenon*

- \Rightarrow the more grammatically complex or elaborate the strategy, the more highly it is rated for politeness

*I wonder if I might ask you to X?
Please X!*



Politeness as a pragmatic phenomenon

Geoffrey Leech

(1936-2014)

- focused on politeness as a pragmatic phenomenon
- politeness is interpreted as a **strategy employed by a speaker to achieve a variety of goals**, such as promoting or maintaining harmonious relations

6.2. Pragmatic approaches to politeness

- **The conversational-maxim approach**
- Leech sees politeness as crucial in explaining *'why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean'*.
- The theory of politeness involves reference to the notions of **cost** and **benefit**, and **directness** and **indirectness**.

cost–
benefit
scale

1. Peel these potatoes
2. Hand me the newspaper
3. Sit down
4. Look at that
5. Enjoy your holiday
6. Have another sandwich

*cost
to H*

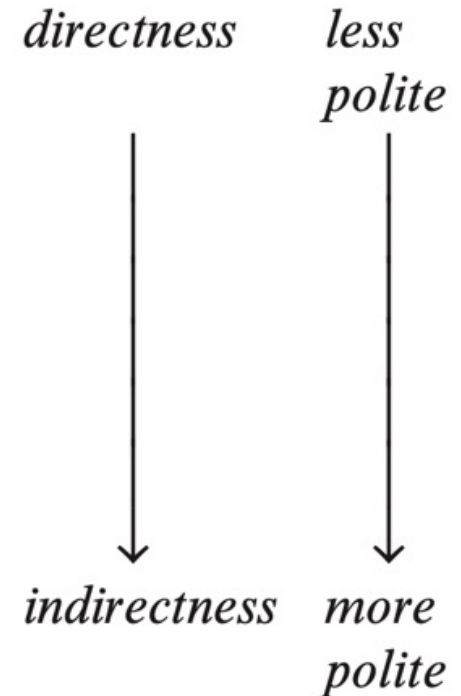
less polite

*benefit
to H*

*more
polite*

directness/
indirectness
scale

7. Answer the phone
8. I want you to . . .
9. Will you . . . ?
10. Can you . . . ?
11. Would you mind . . . ?
12. Could you
possibly . . . ?



Leech introduces concepts **ambivalence** and **pragmatic principles**

By employing an utterance which is ambivalent (one which has more than one potential pragmatic force) it is possible to convey messages which the hearer is liable to find disagreeable without causing undue offence.

Notice in the Queens College, Cambridge:

These newspapers are for all the students, not the privileged few who arrive first.

Leech introduces the
Politeness Principle



**Minimize the expression
of impolite beliefs**



**Maximize the expression
of polite beliefs**



1. The Tact maxim

Minimize the expression of beliefs which imply cost to other; maximize the expression of beliefs which imply benefit to other.



2. The Generosity maxim

*Minimize the expression of benefit to self;
maximize the expression of cost to self.*

approbation

3. The Approbation maxim

Minimize the expression of beliefs which express dispraise of other; maximize the expression of beliefs which express approval of other.

MODESTY

4. The Modesty maxim

*Minimize the expression of praise of self;
maximize the expression of dispraise of self.*



5. The Agreement maxim

Minimize the expression of disagreement between self and other; maximize the expression of agreement between self and other.

6. The Pollyanna Principle
to put the best possible
gloss on what people have
to say





The face-management approach

Erving Goffman, Stephen Levinson, Penelope Brown

concept of 'face'

proposed by
Erving
Goffman
(1967)

Goffman
focuses on the
interaction
between
individuals and
the social world

emphasizes the
way individuals fit
society and its
institutions – how
a person sees
himself
contributing to a
given social
context

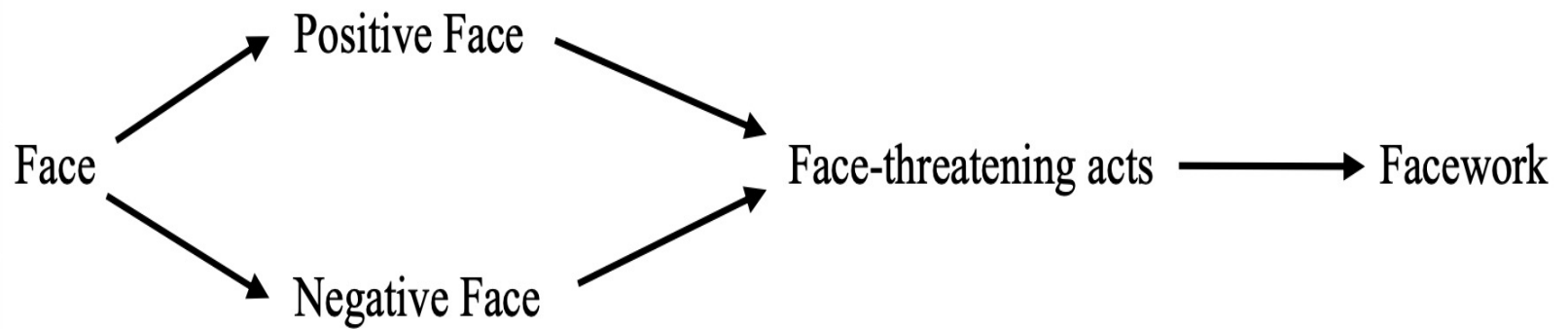
face is
understood as
every
individual's
feeling of self-
worth or self-
image



Theory in a nutshell

- People present a particular **face** (*image*) when interacting.
- Face can vary depending upon the situation and relationship.
- **positive face**: the desire to be seen as competent
- **negative face**: a desire for autonomy and to preserve the status quo
- Face-threatening acts can cause a *loss of face* leading to the use of facework strategies to repair and restore face.

Visualization of Face Theory





FACE

- exists in response to the interactions with others
- a specific image we present to another person
- the image we present is affected by the requirements of the situation or context
- level of consciousness about the face becomes particularly acute when something occurs that undermines people believing our face is genuine (a face-threat)
- our face is primarily displayed through behaviors

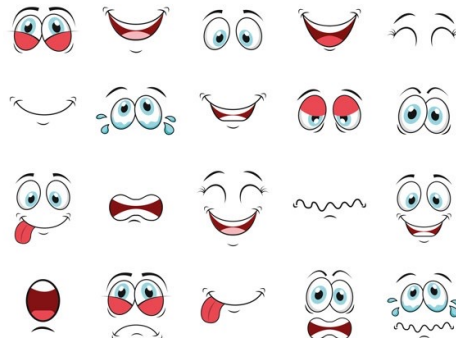
Two faces

Positive face

based on a desire for approval and acceptance by others

Negative face

based on a desire to proceed without being impeded upon



illocutionary acts liable to damage or threaten another person's face

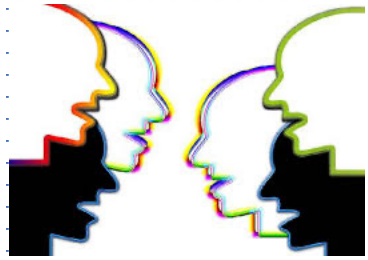
Face-threatening acts



Examples of face-threatening acts



	Actions by others that threaten our face	Actions we take that threaten our own face
Threaten Positive Face	Complaints and insults Criticisms or Disapproval Disagreeing Asking for clarification Evaluations	Apologies and confessions Accepting a compliment Misunderstanding/Requesting clarification Unintended emotional action (laugh) Unintended physical action (burp)
Threaten Negative Face	Orders and requests Advice and suggestions Threats and warnings Reminders Calling in a debt	Accepting an offer Accepting thanks Making a promise or offer Behavior that threatens a relationship Do an unrequested favor



Facework

The aim of facework is to help **maintain face and relationship**. By supporting another person's face, we help to foster or enhance a given relationship.

Principles that relate to **face**

Principle 1: The faces people take are contextually bound and produce a ritual process of orderly but constrained interaction.

Principle 2: We depend upon other people to accept and validate our face, which is called facework.

Principle 3: Numerous strategies are utilized in facework, when managing face-threatening acts, in repairing or restoring face, and by offenders responding to challenges.

Strategies people use to manage threats to other people's faces

- Discretion
- Circumlocutions and deceptions
 - Joking
 - Explanation
 - Approbation
 - Solidarity
 - Tact

Strategies people use to manage threats to their own faces

- **Accepting and correcting**
 - **Ignoring and denying**
 - **Diminishing**
- **Apology and/or compensation**