

INTRODUCTION TO PRAGMATICS

Week 1

Sessions 1.1 + 1.2

08/22 & 08/24

HOUSEKEEPING

- Syllabus
- In groups, discuss :
 - Name, background, interest for this class, interest in general in linguistics, something special about yourself.
- Questions?

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS PRAGMATICS?

- 2 types of meaning:
 - **literal**/at-issue/proffered/lexically encoded meaning (semantics)
 - **intended**/non-at-issue/inferred meaning (pragmatics)
 - Pragmatics = the study of language use in context.
 - Semantics = the study of meaning independent of context.
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PRAGMATIC MEANING

What features does pragmatic meaning have?

- **non-literal:**
 - Can you think of an example?
 - *My day was a nightmare.*
- **context-dependent:**
 - This clause has five words. This one has four.
- **inferential an/or not truth-conditional:**
 - *It's really hot in here! (=> Open the windows/ Turn on the a/c.)*

Does inferential meaning counts as part of the truth of a sentence?

PRAGMATICS VS. OTHER FIELDS

- Language use involves a relationship between form and meaning.
- Pragmatics vs. Discourse Analysis?
 - Pragmatics
 - Uses discourse as data and seeks to draw generalizations that have predictive power concerning our linguistic competence.
 - What happens in discourse?
 - D.A:
 - Focuses on the individual discourse, using the findings of pragmatic theory to shed light on how a particular set of interlocutors use and interpret language in a specific context.
 - What's happening in this discourse?

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- What type of data is used in pragmatics research?
 - Native-speaker intuitions (own, informant)
 - Psycholinguistic experimentation
 - Naturally occurring data (corpus, elicitation, natural observation)
 - More on how to conduct empirical research at the end of the course.
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BOUNDARY BETWEEN SEMANTICS & PRAGMATICS

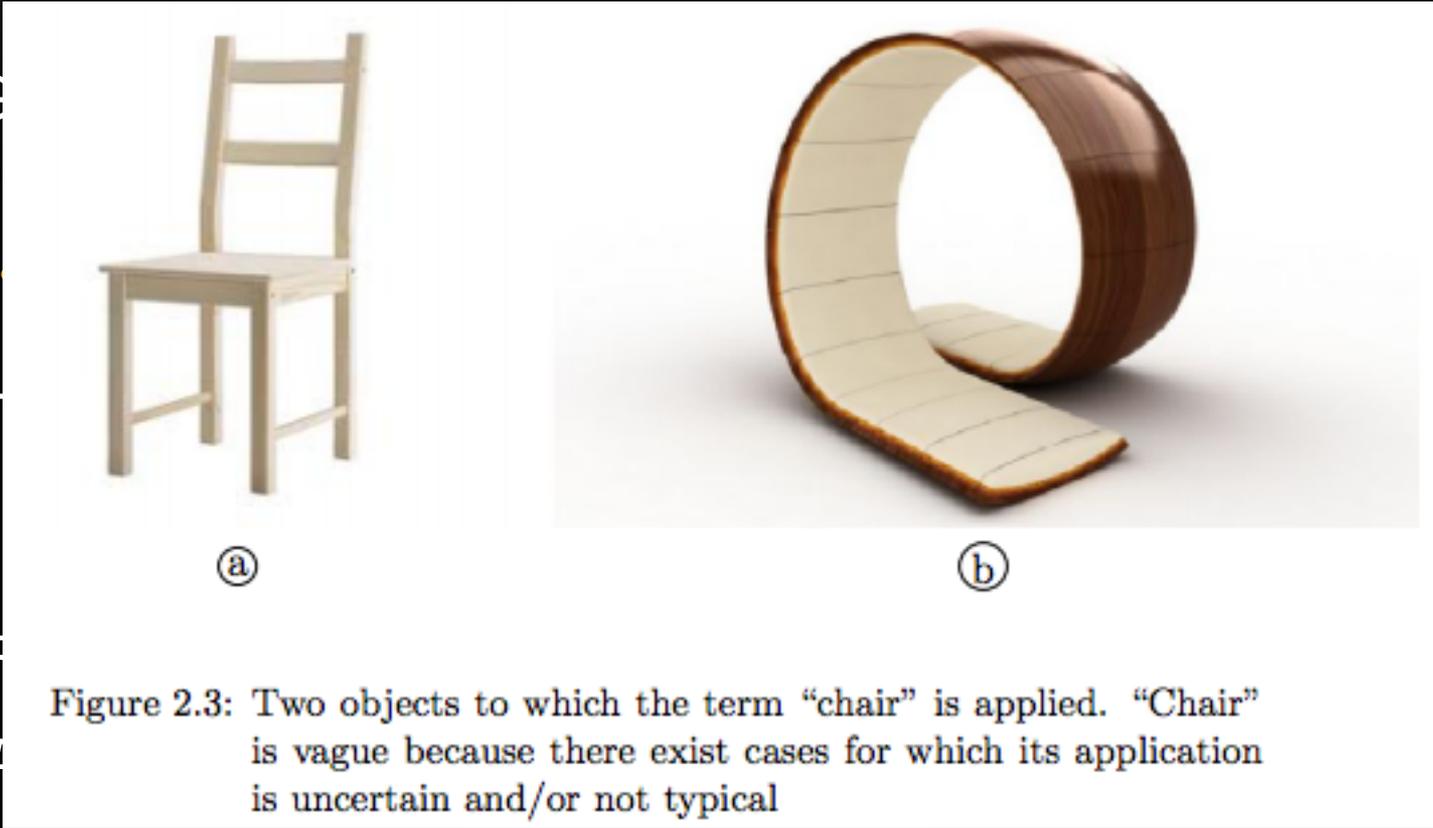
1. THE DOMAIN OF SEMANTICS

- Word-level meaning
 - Synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, homonymy, vagueness, polysemy.
 - Componential analysis (primitive features), fuzzy set theory (prototypes).
 - Sentence-level meaning
 - Compositional semantics.
 - Redundancy, paraphrase, anomaly, ambiguity.
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WORD MEANING:

COMPONENTIAL SEMANTICS WITH PRIMITIVE FEATURES

- G
- p
- L
- F
- A



SENTENCE MEANING

- Refers to those aspects of meaning ascribed to a sentence in the abstract (i.e. independent of its realization in any concrete form)
 - **Compositional semantics:** sum of its parts + rules governing the way in which the meaning of the sentence is built.
 - Redundancy, paraphrase, anomaly, ambiguity.
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FORMAL LOGIC

- **Tautology**: sentence true in all possible worlds.
 - **Contradiction**: sentence false in all possible worlds.
 - **Analytic** sentence: truth of sentence is independent of what the world is like.
 - **Synthetic** sentence: truth of sentence is dependent on conditions of what the world is like.
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BASIC NOTIONS #1:

SENTENCE, UTTERANCE & PROPOSITION

- What is a sentence?
 - A sequence of words.
 - Sentence meaning = literal meaning of words.
- What is an utterance?
 - A sentence produced in some actual context. (Pairing of sentence + context)
 - Utterance/Speaker-meaning = definable as what a speaker intends to convey by making an utterance.
- What is a proposition?
 - What the sentence expresses.
 - Propositional context = that part of its meaning that can be reduced to a proposition.

BASIC NOTIONS #1:

SENTENCE, UTTERANCE & PROPOSITION

- A declarative **sentence**, when **uttered** to make a statement, is said to convey a **proposition**.
 - Propositions may be true or false, may be known, believed, denied, held constant under translations.
 - The same proposition can be expressed by different sentences:
 - Ben bought a car
 - A car was bought by Ben.
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BASIC NOTIONS #1:

SENTENCE, UTTERANCE & PROPOSITION

- Natural language utterances can convey more than one proposition:

Context: Carlos' pocket was picked at the party he is attending with Mario.

Carlos: Who stole my money?

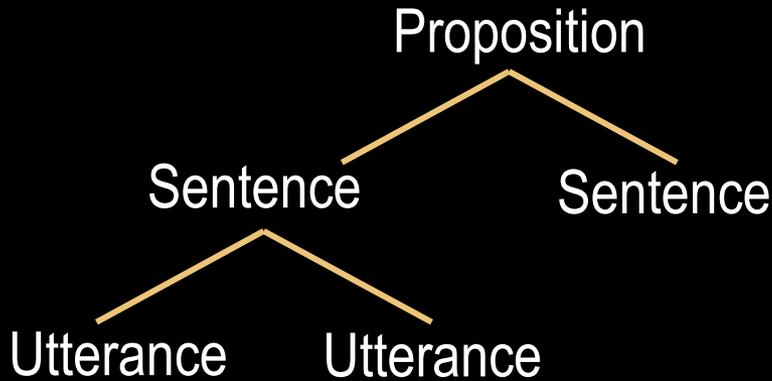
Mario: That man, my mother's friend, stole your money.

What propositions are conveyed by Mario's utterance?

1. Somebody stole my money
2. The person is a man
3. Carlos had money
4. The man indicated stole Carlos' money
5. Mario has a mother
6. The man indicated is Mario's mother's friend. (from Tonhauser, 2012)

Propositions conveyed
often differ in their
primacy!

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SENTENCE, UTTERANCE AND PROPOSITION



- A proposition (being the most abstract of the 3 notions) can be expressed by different sentences. A given sentence, being the next most abstract notion, can itself be instantiated by different utterances, the least abstract notion of all.

BASIC NOTIONS #2:

TRUTH-CONDITIONS, TRUTH VALUE & ENTAILMENT

- **Truth-value**: context in which a proposition is true or false.
- **Truth-condition**: conditions under which a sentence is true, which is independent of what the world actually is like.
 - *Snow is white* is true if and only if snow is actually white.
 - S is true iff p.
- **Truth-conditional meaning**: any piece of meaning that affects the conditions under which a sentence would be true.
 1. Only John₁ voted for John₁.
 2. Only John₁ voted for himself₁.

Assuming that John was not the only person who voted, do these sentences share the same truth-conditions?

BASIC NOTIONS #2:

TRUTH-CONDITIONS, TRUTH VALUE & ENTAILMENT

Entailment A proposition (or sentence expressing a proposition) p entails a proposition (or sentence expressing a proposition) q iff the truth of p guarantees the truth of q .

- Strong kind of implication, which is semantic in nature.
- Examples:
 - Sue and Fred went to the party \models Sue went to the party
 - JFK was assassinated \models JFK is dead.

2. THE DOMAIN OF PRAGMATICS

- Non-natural meaning = no automatic, natural correlation between the word/sentence and its meaning.
- **Sense vs. referent.**
 - Unlike sense, it's possible for reference to vary in different contexts.
- **Utterance/Speaker-meaning** = defined as what a speaker intends to convey by making an utterance.
 - *I'm cold* → speaker can intend to convey different messages.

MUTUAL BELIEFS

- Needed in order for the intentions of interlocutors to be relevant and go through, leading to successful communication.
 - Comprehenders must recognize speakers' intentions for successful communication to happen.
 - Pop quiz example p.27 (Birner)
 - Lifeguard example p.3 (Green)
 - Belief is what makes the difference between a lie and a mistake, or between informing and reminding.
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PLANS AND ACTS

- Task of the discourse-interpreter/comprehender is to:
 - understand what the speaker has said, i.e. to construct a mental model of the situation which the speaker is indicating exists,
 - evaluate that model and use it to update his own model of the world.
 - How does the conduit metaphor (Reddy, 1979) provide a misleading view of linguistic communication?
 - What properties of language support the blueprint metaphor of the toolmakers' paradigm?
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SOME BOUNDARY PHENOMENA

- Anaphoric pronouns
 - Challenges the assumption that there is no context-dependent input into truth conditions.
- Conventional implicatures
 - Aspect of meaning that are context-independent but not truth-conditional.
 - Example of *but* in Birner p.33/34.

SUMMARY

- In general, the dividing line between semantics & pragmatics can be drawn on the basis of context-dependence or truth-conditional status, but not both.
 - Overarching question: Which definition is the most helpful definition of pragmatics?
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EXERCISES

ENTAILMENTS

- For each pair of sentences below, please indicate whether the sentence in (A) entails that in (B):
 - 1– A. Susan is always complaining. B. Susan is often complaining.
 - 2– A. It's raining. B. It's cold.
 - 3–A. Some of my friends got promoted. B. Not all of my friends got promoted.
 - 4–A. Henry and Jane are married. B. Henry and Jane are married to each other.
 - 5–A. Everyone likes an apple. B. Everyone likes a piece of fruit.
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BASIC NOTIONS

- Answer the following questions with a partner:
 - What are the differences, if any, between utterances and sentences?
 - Why is context so important in pragmatics?
 - Complete the following exercises in Birner:
 - 5 p.36,
 - 6 p.37,
 - 12. & 15 p.38.
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