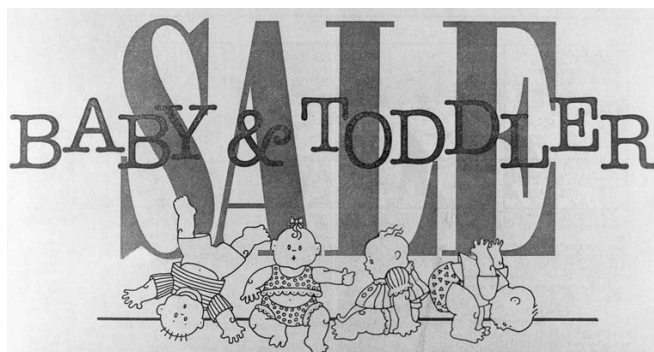


University of Tikrit
College of Education for Women
Assist. Lect. Ruqaya B. Abdurrahman

Pragmatics

pragmatics is the study of “invisible” meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn’t actually said or written. In order for that to happen, speakers (or writers) must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations when they try to communicate. The investigation of those assumptions and expectations provides us with some insights into how more is always being communicated than is said.

Driving by a parking garage, you may see a large sign like the one in the picture. You read the sign, knowing what each of the words means and what the sign as a whole means. However, you don’t normally think that the sign is advertising a place where you can park your “heated attendant.” (You take an attendant, you heat him/her up, and this is where you can park him/her.) Alternatively, the sign may indicate a place where parking will be carried out by attendants who have been heated.



In the other picture, assuming things are normal and this store has not gone into the business of selling young children, we can recognize an advertisement for a sale of clothes for those babies and toddlers. The word clothes doesn't appear in the message, but we can bring that idea to our interpretation of the message as we work out what the advertiser intended us to understand.

Context

There are different kinds of context. One kind is described as linguistic context, also known as co-text. The co-text of a word is the set of other words used in the same phrase or sentence. The surrounding co-text has a strong effect on what we think the word probably means we identified the word bank as a homonym, a single form with more than one meaning. How do we usually know which meaning is intended in a particular sentence? We normally do so on the basis of linguistic context.

If the word bank is used in a sentence together with words like steep or overgrown, we have no problem deciding which type of bank is meant. Or, if we hear someone say that she has to get to the bank to withdraw some cash, we know from this linguistic context which type of bank is intended.

More generally, we know how to interpret words on the basis of physical context. If we see the word BANK on the wall of a building in a city, the physical location will influence our interpretation. While this may seem rather obvious, we should keep in mind that it is not the actual physical situation "out there" that constitutes "the context" for interpreting words or sentences. The relevant context is our *mental representation of those aspects of what is physically out there that we use in arriving at an interpretation*.

Reference

We have to define reference as an act by which a speaker (or writer) uses language to enable a listener (or reader) to identify something. To perform an act of reference, we can use proper

nouns (Chomsky, Jennifer, Whiskas), other nouns in phrases (a writer, my friend, the cat) or pronouns (he, she, it). We sometimes assume that these words identify someone or something uniquely, but it is more accurate to say that, for each word or phrase, there is a “range of reference.” The words Jennifer or friend or she can be used to refer to many entities in the world.

We can also refer to things when we’re not sure what to call them. For instance, there was a man who always drove his motorcycle fast and loud through my neighborhood and was locally referred to as Mr. Kawasaki. In this case, a brand name for a motorcycle is being used to refer to a person.

Inference

As in the “Mr. Kawasaki” example, a successful act of reference depends more on the listener’s ability to recognize what we mean than on the listener’s “dictionary” knowledge of a word we use. For example, in a restaurant, one waiter can ask another, Where’s the spinach salad sitting? and receive the reply, He’s sitting by the door. The key process here is called inference. An inference is additional information used by the listener to create a connection between what is said and what must be meant.

Presupposition

When we use a referring expression like this, he or Shakespeare, we usually assume that our listeners can recognize which referent is intended. In a more general way, we design our linguistic messages on the basis of large-scale assumptions about what our listeners already know. Some of these assumptions may be mistaken, of course, but mostly they’re appropriate. What a speaker (or writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (or reader) can be described as a presupposition.

If you are asked the question (When did you stop smoking?), there are at least two presuppositions involved. In asking this question, the speaker presupposes that you used to smoke and that you no longer do so.

One of the tests used to check for the presuppositions underlying sentences involves negating a sentence with a particular presupposition and checking if the presupposition remains true. Whether you say (My car is a wreck) or the negative version (My car is not a wreck), the underlying presupposition (I have a car) remains true despite the fact that the two sentences have opposite meanings. This is called the “constancy under negation” test for identifying a presupposition. If someone says, (I used to regret marrying him), but (I don’t regret marrying him now), the presupposition (I married him) remains constant even though the verb regret changes from affirmative to negative.

Speech Acts

We use the term speech act to describe actions such as “requesting,” “commanding,” “questioning” or “informing.” We can define a speech act as the action performed by a speaker with an utterance. If you say, I’ll be there at six, you are not just speaking, you seem to be performing the speech act of “promising.”

Direct and indirect speech acts

We usually use certain syntactic structures with the functions listed beside them in the following table.

	Structures	Functions
Did you eat the pizza?	Interrogative	Question
Eat the pizza (please)!	Imperative	Command (Request)
You ate the pizza.	Declarative	Statement

When an interrogative structure such as Did you...?, Are they...? or Can we...? is used with the function of a question, it is described as a direct speech act. For example, when we don't know something and we ask someone to provide the information, we usually produce a direct speech act such as Can you ride a bicycle?.

Compare that utterance with (Can you pass the salt?). In this second example, we are not really asking a question about someone's ability. In fact, we don't normally use this structure as a question at all. We normally use it to make a request. That is, we are using a syntactic structure associated with the function of a question, but in this case with the function of a request. This is an example of an indirect speech act. Whenever one of the structures in the set above is used to perform a function other than the one listed beside it on the same line, the result is an **indirect speech act**.

The utterance (You left the door open) has a declarative structure and, as a direct speech act, would be used to make a statement. However, if you say this to someone who has just come in (and it's really cold outside), you would probably want that person to close the door. You are not using the imperative structure. You are using a declarative structure to make a request. It's another example of an indirect speech act.

The main reason we use indirect speech acts seems to be that actions such as requests, presented in an indirect way (Could you open that door for me?), are generally considered to be more gentle or more polite in our society than direct speech acts (Open that door for me!). Exactly why they are considered to be more polite is based on some complex social assumptions.

Politeness

We can think of politeness in general terms as having to do with ideas like being tactful, modest and nice to other people. In the study of linguistic politeness, the most relevant concept is "**face**." Your face, in pragmatics, is your public self-image. This is the emotional and

social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. Politeness can be defined as showing awareness and consideration of another person's face.

If you say something that represents a threat to another person's self-image, that is called a **face-threatening act**. For example, if you use a direct speech act to get someone to do something (Give me that paper!), you are behaving as if you have more social power than the other person. If you don't actually have that social power (e.g. you're not a military officer or prison warden), then you are performing a face threatening act. An indirect speech act, in the form associated with a question (Could you pass me that paper?), removes the assumption of social power. You're only asking if it's possible. This makes your request less threatening to the other person's face. Whenever you say something that lessens the possible threat to another's face, it can be described as a **face-saving act**.

Negative and positive face

We have both a negative face and a positive face. (Note that "negative" doesn't mean "bad" here, it's simply the opposite of "positive.") **Negative face** is the need to be independent and free from imposition. **Positive face** is the need to be connected, to belong, to be a member of the group. So, a face-saving act that emphasizes a person's negative face will show concern about imposition (I'm sorry to bother you...; I know you're busy, but...). A face-saving act that emphasizes a person's positive face will show solidarity and draw attention to a common goal (Let's do this together...; You and I have the same problem, so...).

Ideas about the appropriate language to mark politeness differ substantially from one culture to the next. If you have grown up in a culture that has directness as a valued way of showing solidarity, and you use direct speech acts (Give me that chair!) to people whose culture is more oriented to indirectness and avoiding direct imposition, then you will be considered impolite. You, in turn, may think of the others as vague and unsure of whether they really want something or are just asking about it (Are you using this chair?). In either case, it is the pragmatics that is misunderstood and, unfortunately, more will be communicated than is said.

