

# COURSE: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

LECTURE 7: PRAGMATICS VS SEMANTICS

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# INTRODUCTION

- ▶ We have spent the last six weeks looking at semantics.
- ▶ Our main observation was that language structures( sounds, morphemes, words, phrases) contribute to meaning.
- ▶ We also looked at various terms like sense, reference, naming.
- ▶ We explored theories of meaning
- ▶ We also looked at the types of meaning
- ▶ Sense relations

# INTRODUCTION

- ▶ In our lesson today, we shall look at how semantics relates to pragmatics, and
- ▶ How they differ
- ▶ We shall start by providing a description of pragmatics.
- ▶ What is Pragmatics? Take two minutes to respond to this question.
- ▶ Note that, just as semantics, it deals with meaning.

# MEANING OF PRAGMATICS

- ▶ Pragmatics- concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer)
- ▶ and interpreted by a listener (or reader)
- ▶ analysis of what people mean by their utterances than;
- ▶ What the words and phrases in those sentences mean
- ▶ It is hence the study of the speaker's meaning

# MEANING OF PRAGMATICS

- ▶ Involves interpretation of what people mean in a particular context and
- ▶ how the context influences what is said.
- ▶ It considers how speakers organize what they want to say in accordance with who they're talking to
- ▶ where, when, under what circumstances
- ▶ Hence it is also the study of contextual meaning.

# MEANING OF PRAGMATICS

- ▶ It explores how listeners can make inferences about what is said in order to arrive at interpretation of the speaker's intended meaning .
- ▶ This type of study explores how a great deal of what is unsaid is recognized as part of what is communicated.
- ▶ Pragmatics hence looks at how more gets communicated than what is said.

# MEANING OF PRAGMATICS

- ▶ What determine the choice between what is said and unsaid?
- ▶ The answer is tied to the notion of distance:
- ▶ closeness, whether physical, social, conceptual, implied shared experience.

- ▶ Hence the speaker determines how much needs to be said, depending on how close or distant the listener is.
- ▶ As such pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance
- ▶ What is distance in this context?

# FOUR AREAS:

- ▶ These are the four areas pragmatics is concerned with as provided by Yule (1996):
- ▶ the study of the speaker's meaning
- ▶ The study of contextual meaning
- ▶ How more gets communicated than what is said.
- ▶ The expression of relative distance
- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.  
(pp 1-4)

# SYNTAX, SEMANTICS & PRAGMATICS

- ▶ SYNTAX - study of the relationship between linguistic forms, how they are arranged in sequence and which sequences are well formed.
- ▶ Looks at the rules that determine the correct structures and exclude any incorrect ordering.
- ▶ Does not consider any world of reference or any user of the forms

# SYNTAX, SEMANTICS & PRAGMATICS

- ▶ SEMANTICS- study of the relationship between linguistic forms and entities in the world,
- ▶ How words literally connect to things
- ▶ It attempts to establish the relationship between verbal descriptions and states of affairs in the world as accurate (true) or not,
- ▶ It does not consider who produces that description.

# SYNTAX, SEMANTICS & PRAGMATICS

- ▶ PRAGMATICS - study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms.
- ▶ The only one that allows humans into the analysis.
- ▶ The advantage of studying language via pragmatics is that it can talk about:

# Advantages of pragmatics

## ► It can talk about:

- ❑ people's intended meaning
- ❑ Their assumptions
- ❑ Their purposes or goals
- ❑ Kinds of action (command, requests) they perform when they speak.

# Disadvantage

- ▶ The disadvantage is that:
- ▶ All these very human communication are extremely difficult to analyze in a consistent and objective way.
- ▶ CONSIDER
  - ▶ Two friends having a conversation may imply some things and infer others without providing any clear linguistic evidence that we can point to as the explicit source of the meaning of what is communicated.
  - ▶ A: *So-did you?*
  - ▶ B: *Hey- who wouldn't ?*
  - ▶ This case is problematic to analyze.

# Evaluating Pragmatics

- ▶ Hence pragmatics is appealing because-
- ▶ It is about how people make sense of each other linguistically,
- ▶ But can be a frustrating area of study because-
- ▶ It requires us to make sense of people and what they have in mind.

# REGULARITY

- ▶ LUCKILY, people tend to behave in fairly regular ways when it comes to using language.
- ▶ Sources of regularity
- ▶ 1. This regularity may be due to the fact that people are members of social groups
- ▶ They follow general patterns of behaviour expected within the group.

# Regularity

- ▶ In a familiar setting,
- ▶ we are aware of what we should say or not say
- ▶ In unfamiliar settings,
- ▶ we are unsure of what to say and worry that we might say the wrong things.

# Regularity

- ▶ 2. Most people within a linguistic community have similar basic experiences of the world and,
- ▶ Share a lot of non-linguistic knowledge

# 'The rejected stone becomes the cornerstone' metaphor

- ▶ In Yule's terms, this is the pragmatics wastebasket
- ▶ What does this mean?
- ▶ This simply means that this area, for a long time, has not received the attention it deserves!  
Why? The focus
- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.

(pp 6)

# Pragmatics wastebasket

- ▶ Formal systems of analysis often derived from mathematics and logic dominated language study.
- ▶ Emphasis lay on the abstract principles that lie at the core of language use.
- ▶ Any notes on every day language use was pushed to the edges, to the wastebasket!

# Pragmatics wastebasket

- ▶ Why?
- ▶ Linguists could not handle everyday language use material within formal linguistics.
- ▶ Pragmatics therefore attempts to pull out these materials from the wastebasket.
- ▶ They are not a waste after all but they are like the rejected stone turning into a cornerstone!

# Key differences

- ▶ Semantics :
- ▶ The study of words and their meanings within language.
- ▶ Pragmatics
- ▶ The study of words and their meanings within language placed within context.

# Key differences

- ▶ Semantics
- ▶ Looks at the literal meanings of words.
- ▶ Pragmatics
- ▶ Looks at the intended meaning of words.

# Key differences

- ▶ Semantics
- ▶ Limited to the relationship between words.
- ▶ Pragmatics
- ▶ Covers the relationships between words, interlocutors (people engaged in the conversation), and contexts.

# Pragmatics and Semantics

- ▶ Pragmatics helps us look beyond the literal meaning of words and utterances and focuses on how meaning is constructed within **context**.
- ▶ When we communicate with other people, there is a constant negotiation of meaning between the listener and the speaker.
- ▶ Pragmatics looks at this negotiation and aims to understand what people mean when they use a language and how they communicate with each other.

# Pragmatics and semantics

- ▶ Pragmatics looks at the difference between the **literal meaning of words and their intended meaning within social contexts** and takes things such as irony, metaphors and intended meanings into account.
- ▶ It is important as it is key to understanding language use in context and acts as the basis for all language interactions.
- ▶ It takes a more practical approach to understand the construction of meaning within language.

# Pragmatics and semantics

- ▶ Semantics deals with meaning features
- ▶ Consider:
- ▶ The dog barked at the guests,
- ▶ Semantic features can be attributed to the participants as:
- ▶ The dog (+animate, - human)
- ▶ The guests (+ human)

# Pragmatics and semantics

- ▶ Semantics is concerned with the truth-condition of propositions expressed in sentences.
- ▶ These propositions generally correspond to the basic literal meaning of a simple clause.
- ▶ The dog barked at the visitors- What truth condition is here?

# Generally then

- ▶ We have seen that both pragmatics and semantics deal with meaning.
- ▶ However, the levels of meaning are different.
- ▶ **Activity:**
- ▶ Give an example of a sentence and show the distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

# Hint

- ▶ **Please go and sit down.:**
- ▶ In semantics, this is a request expressing that one should obey the request positively.
- ▶ In pragmatics, the context must be considered:
- ▶ Who is saying this?
- ▶ To who?
- ▶ Why?
- ▶ When?
- ▶ What tone of voice is used?

# Pragmatics topics

- ▶ Under pragmatics, the following areas will be studied.
- ▶ Deixis and distance
- ▶ Reference and inference
- ▶ Presupposition and entailment
- ▶ Cooperation and implicatures
- ▶ Speech acts and events
- ▶ Politeness and interaction
- ▶ Conversation and preference structure

# Next lesson

- ▶ In our next lesson,
- ▶ We shall be looking at Deixis and distance.

# Reference

- ▶ Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.