

Pragmatics and Discourse

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Overview

- Context
- Conversation and Cooperation
- Conversational Maxims
- Politeness
- Indirect Speech
- Summary



Roadmap

- 1 Reference and Context
- 2 Conversational Implicature
- 3 Politeness
- 4 Austin's Speech Act Theory
- 5 Indirect Speech Acts
- 6 Summary of Semantics and Pragmatics



We interpret words in **context**

- For example, in a bookshop
 - (1) *Have you got the new C.J. Cherryh?* “book by ~”
- In a snooker (pool) game
 - (2) *I have two reds left* “red balls”
- **metonymy**: substituting the name of an attribute or feature for the name of the thing itself
 - (3) *The ham sandwich is at table three* “person who ordered ~”
 - (4) *I spent all morning with the suits* “person who habitually wears ~”¹
- **synecdoche**: substituting the name of a part for the name of a thing (a kind of metonymy)
 - (5) *We need some more willing hands* “person with ~”

¹A person who wears matching jacket and trousers, especially a boss or a supervisor (pejorative)



All knowledge is context

- Knowledge to interpret utterances can come from multiple sources
 - ① **Deixis**: The physical context of the utterance
 - *My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her.* “221B Baker Street” SPEC
 - ② **Discourse**: What has already been said
 - *The dog_i chased the cat_j. Eventually it_i caught it_j.*
 - *My stepdaughter_i has been here. I have traced her_i.* SPEC
 - ③ **World knowledge**: Background and common knowledge
 - *I would like to go to the moon.* “the Earth’s moon”



Context can complete fragments

- In a dialogue, we often only add new knowledge

(6) a. *Who moved these chairs?*
b. *Sandy (did) [move these chairs]*

(7) a. *Where are you going?*
b. *[I am going] (to) Tokyo*

(8) a. *'What is it, then? [Is it] A fire?'*
b. *'No [it is not], [It is] a client. ...'*

SPEC

- Normally English requires a complete sentence,
... but here a **fragment** is OK



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Cooperation in Conversation

- **Cooperative Principle:** people cooperate in conversation
“Make your conversational 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.”
Grice (1975)
- **Implicature**
The aspect of meaning that a speaker conveys, implies, or suggests without directly expressing.

(9) *Did you do the reading?*

(10) *I meant to.*

Implicates: No



Maxim of Quantity

- Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
- Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Maxim of Quality

- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack proper evidence.



Maxim of Relation

- Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner

- Be perspicuous [= be easily understood]²
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)
- Be orderly

²A philosopher's joke.

An Example of implicature I

Speech that seems to violate the maxims will evoke **implicatures** (inferences about the reason why the speaker violated the maxim(s)). This is because the hearer assumes the speaker is acting in accordance with the Cooperative Principle, and is rational.

(11) A: *Can you tell me the time?*

Lit: Do you have the ability to tell me the time?

(12) B: *Well, the school bus just left.*

Lit.: The school bus left prior to the time of speaking.



An Example of implicature II

What is meant:

- A Do you have the ability to tell me the time of the present moment, as standardly indicated on a watch, and if so, please do so tell me what time it is.
- B No, I don't know the exact time of the present moment, but I can provide some information from which you may be able to deduce the approximate time, namely the school bus usually leaves at a specific, regular time (e.g., 8:00am)
- A flouted Manner — why not request that you are told the time?
- B flouted Relation — what does this have to do with the time?

A assumes B is being cooperative, so the response must somehow be helpful; this triggers the implicature.



Various Conversational Implicatures

- Sometimes no special knowledge is required in the context to calculate the additional conveyed meaning (**Generalized Conversational Implicatures**)

(13) *Did you bring the flowers and the card?*

(14) *I brought the card.*

Implicature: but not the flowers.

- Most of our conversations take place in very specific contexts in which locally recognized inferences are assumed. (**Particularized Conversational Implicatures**)

(15) *Hey Terry, are you coming to the party tonight?*

(16) *My parents are visiting.* “So I am busy/So I have a babysitter”

- All implicatures are **defeasible**: they can be canceled without a contradiction.

(17) *But I can still come.*



Scalar Implicatures

Certain information is communicated by choosing a word which expresses one value from a scale of values.

(18) *< all, most, many, some, few >*

(19) *< always, often, sometimes >*

We should choose the word from the scale which is the most informative and truthful in the circumstances (Quantity and Quality). Words on the scale implicate the negation of words on their left:

(20) *I've watched some of the new season.*

(21) *They are often late.*

(22) *I got some of these antiques in London –hang on, actually I think I got most of them there.* (defeasible)



Horn Scales

To form a Horn scale $\langle S, W \rangle$, two words (S and W) must satisfy the following conditions:

- (i) $A(S)$ must entail $A(W)$ for some arbitrary sentence frame A ;
 - (ii) S and W must be equally lexicalized;
 - (iii) S and W must be about the same semantic relations, or from the same semantic field.
- Words on the scale implicate the negation of words on their left
 - ▶ $\langle \textit{always, often, sometimes} \rangle$.
 - ▶ $\langle \dots, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 \rangle$.
 - ▶ $\langle \textit{hot, warm, lukewarm, cold} \rangle$.
 - ▶ $\langle \textit{the, \{a, some\}} \rangle$.



Flouting the maxims

- Quantity: (In answer to *Tell me all about him!:*) *He has a nice personality.*
- Quality: (In response to something stupid someone did:) *That was brilliant!*
- Relation: (In response to *Can I go out and play?:*) *Did you finish your homework?*
- Quality:
 - (23) *My car breaks down every five minutes* hyperbole
 - (24) *I've got millions of bottles of wine in my cellar* hyperbole
 - (25) *Queen Victoria was made of iron* metaphor
 - (26) *I love it when you sing out of tune* irony or sarcasm
- Manner: (to obscure from a third party:) *Shall we get some I-C-E C-R-E-A-M?*



What happens when we flout?

- If someone doesn't understand this, (e.g. someone from another culture), then what was originally intended to be a metaphor may result in a **lie**.
- We may flout:
 - ▶ Quantity:
 - say more than we need to indicate a sense of occasion, or respect
 - say less than we need, in order to be blunt, or rude
 - ▶ Quality:
 - white lies
 - ▶ Relation
 - to signal embarrassment
 - to change the subject
 - ▶ Manner
 - for the sake of humour
 - to obscure information (parents talking in front of children)
 - to show in-group status, ...



Hedges

When we **flout** a maxim, we can use **hedges**:

(27) Quantity:

- a. *As you probably know*, ...
- b. *To cut a long story short*, ...

(28) Quality:

- a. *In the kitchen, I believe.*
- b. *As far as I'm aware*, Kim is still on medication.

DANC

(29) Relation:

- a. *I don't know if this will affect the bottom line*, but some of the numbers are missing.

(30) Manner:

- a. *I'm not sure if this makes sense*, but the car had no lights.



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Why be Indirect?

- Mainly for politeness

(31) [Motorist to gas station attendant]

a. *You don't happen to have any change for the phone do you?*

(32) [Doctor to Nurse]

a. *I'll need a 19 gauge needle, IV tubing and some unobtainium*

(33) [Teacher to student?]

a. *Please give me a hand with this?*

b. *Would you be so kind as to give me a hand with this? ?*

⇒ Low Status → High Status is generally more indirect than High → Low



Politeness and Face-Threatening Acts



Positive Face desire to seem worthy and deserving of approval
self-worth: I want you to like me/think well of me!



Negative Face desire to be autonomous, unimpeded by others
freedom: I want you not to bother me!

- It is argued that we all have these two faces — they are universal
- But they are always under threat!
- For more see **Brown and Levinson (1987)**



Face Threatening Acts

☺ Threaten Positive Face

▶ Hearer

- explicit expressions of disapproval
- expressions of indifference, interruption, boasting
- identification of status (*boy* not *doctor*)

▶ Speaker

- apologies, accepting a compliment, confession, losing control

☹ Threaten Negative Face

▶ Hearer

- orders, requests, suggestions, advice
- compliments, expressions of envy or admiration
- offers or promises (adds obligation)

▶ Speaker

- thanks, excuses, acceptance of offers or apologies



Face Saving Strategies

- Bald (on-record)
- Positive Politeness:
 - ▶ be attentive, appeal to in-group, joke
 - ▶ reciprocate: *I'll help you if you help me*
 - ▶ compliment: *You're looking good today, ...*
- Negative Politeness:
 - ▶ hedge to minimize threat: *I may be wrong but, ...*
 - ▶ allow for negative face: *Could you please, ...*
 - ▶ ask indirectly: *Have you got the time, ...*
- Indirect (off-record)
 - ▶ *It's hot in here* “please turn on the aircon”
- ? Which face is threatened, and how does Holmes save it? *There may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket.*

REDH



An example of polite, indirect speech (gone wrong)

(34) [Knock on the door]

(35) Leonard: *Wanna get that?*

(36) Sheldon: *Not particularly.*

(37) Leonard: *Could you get that?*

(38) Sheldon: *I suppose I could if I were asked.*

[Knock on the door]

(39) Leonard: *Would you please get that?*

(40) Sheldon: *Well of course!
Why do you have to make things so complicated?*

The Big Bang Theory: *The Apology Insufficiency* (S4E7)



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Speech as Action

- Language is often used to **do** things: **speech acts**
language has both
 - ▶ **interactivity**
 - ▶ **context dependence**
- E.g. If you greet someone or ask them a question, and they don't respond it is very awkward
- For more see **Austin (1962)**



Sentence Types

- There are four syntactic types that correlate closely to pragmatic uses

syntactic type		pragmatic use	example
declarative	↔	assertion	<i>This is my friend</i>
interrogative	↔	question	<i>Are you my friend?</i>
imperative	↔	order	<i>Be my friend!</i>
optative	↔	wish	<i>Oh that you were my friend!</i>

- But it turns out there is a lot of flexibility:

- (41) a. *Would you like a beer?* question
b. *Is the pope Catholic?* assertion
c. *You are sure that she has not sent it yet?* (SCAN) question



Language as Truth

- One tradition of semantics is based on these assumptions
 - ▶ the basic sentence type is declarative
 - ▶ language is mainly used to describe the world
 - ▶ meaning can be given in terms of truth values
- It doesn't deal well with these

(42) *Excuse me!*

(43) *Hello.*

(44) *How much can a Koala bear?*

(45) *Six pints of lager and some nachos, thanks!*

(46) *How 'bout them niners?* (change the subject)



Truth conditions in Czech?

- The same issues arise in any language, e.g. Czech:
 - (47) *Promiňte!* “Excuse me!”
 - (48) *Dobrý den.* “Hello.”
 - (49) *Na zdraví!* “Cheers!”
 - (50) *Dobrou chuť!* “Enjoy your meal!”
 - (51) *A co takhle to počasí?* “What about this weather?” (change the subject)
 - (52) *Dvě piva a svíčkovou, prosím.* “Two beers and a svíčková, please.”
- The last example could be analysed as a **fragment** — Czech case marking (accusative *piva, svíčkovou*) makes the elided [*Chci*] ‘I want’ highly recoverable — or as a non-propositional order.
- Note: *Jak šla Sigma včera?* “How did Sigma do yesterday?” lacks the conventionalized topic-change force of *How 'bout them niners?*

Performative Utterances

(53) *I promise I won't drive home*

(54) *I bet you 5 bucks they get caught*

(55) *I declare this lecture over*

(56) *I warn you that legal action will ensue*

(57) *I name this ship the Nautilus*

- Uttering these (in an appropriate context) **is** acting
Utterances themselves can be actions
- In English, we can signal this explicitly with *hereby*



Felicity Conditions

- Performatives (vs Constantives)

Given the correct **felicity conditions**

A1 There must exist an accepted conventional procedure that includes saying certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances,

A2 The circumstances must be appropriate for the invocation

B1 All participants must perform the procedure correctly

B2 ...and completely

C1 The intention must be to do this act

C2 The participants must conduct themselves so subsequently.

- If the conditions don't hold, the speech act is **infelicitous**
 - ▶ Failing **A** or **B** is a **misfire**
 - ▶ Failing **C** is an **abuse**



Examples of Infelicities

- **A1** *I hereby marry you* (said by someone not authorized to do so)
- **A2** *I baptize this baby Harold* (baby's name should be Herman)
- **A2** *I pronounce John Smith dead* (uttered by a doctor who has confused John Smith with John Smit, or if John Smith is still alive)
- **B1** *Yes* (exchanging vows in a Christian marriage ceremony)
- **B1** *OK* (in response to *Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?* –wrong formula)
- **B2** *I bet you \$50 the opposition loses the next election* (infelicitous without a response: *OK –you're on*; Austin calls the required response uptake)
- **C1** *Guilty as charged* (if accused known to be innocent by a jury member)
- **C2** *I promise to come tomorrow* (if there is no intention to keep to the promise)



Explicit and Implicit Performatives

- **Explicit Performatives**

- ▶ Tend to be first person
- ▶ The main verb is a performative: *promise, warn, sentence, bet, pronounce, ...*
- ▶ You can use *hereby*

- **Implicit Performatives**

(58) *You are hereby charged with treason* [by me]

(59) *Students are requested to be quiet in the halls* [by NTU]

(60) *10 bucks says they'll be late* [I bet you]

(61) *Come up and see me some time!* [I invite you]

Can be made explicit by adding an active performative verb



Searle's speech act classification

Declarative changes the world (like performatives)

Representative describes the (speaker's view of the) world

Expressives express how the speaker feels

Directives get someone else to do something

Commissives commit oneself to a future action

For more see **Searle (1969)**



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Indirect speech acts

Sentence Type		Speech Act	Example
declarative	↔	assertion (statement)	<i>I sing.</i>
interrogative	↔	question	<i>Do you sing?</i>
imperative	↔	order (request, command)	<i>sing!</i>
exclamative	↔	exclamation	<i>What a voice!</i>
optative	↔	wish	<i>If only I could sing</i>



Literal and non-literal uses

- (62) a. *Could you get that?*
b. *Please pass the salt.*
- (63) a. *I wish you wouldn't do that.*
b. *Please don't do that.*
- (64) a. *You left the door open.*
b. *Please close the door.*

- People have access to both the literal and non-literal meanings
- Non-literal meanings can be slower to understand
- Some non-literal uses are very conventionalized
Can/Could you X? → Please X
- Questioning the felicity conditions produces an indirect version



Felicity Conditions for Requesting

These things must hold for an utterance to be a **request**:

- **Preparatory 1:** H (hearer) is able to perform A (future action)
- **Preparatory 2:** It is not obvious that the H would perform A without being asked
- **Propositional:** S (speaker) predicates a future act A of H
- **Sincerity:** S wants H to do A
- **Essential:** The utterance e counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A

? Form different indirect requests with the following strategies: ?

- 1 By querying the preparatory content of the direct request
- 2 By stating the propositional content of the direct request
- 3 By querying the propositional content of the direct request
- 4 By stating the sincerity condition of the direct request.



Indirect Requests

- **Preparatory 1:** H is able to perform A
- **Preparatory 2:** It is not obvious that the H would perform A without being asked
- **Propositional:** S predicates a future act A of H
- **Sincerity:** S wants H to do A
- **Essential:** The utterance e counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A

- **Preparatory 1:** *Can you tell me the time?*
- **Preparatory 2:** *Would you let me know the time?*
- **Propositional:** *Aren't you going to start your annotation?*
- **Sincerity:** *I wish you would answer me*



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The big picture I

- We can do many things with words
 - ▶ Convey information
 - ▶ Express attitudes
 - ▶ Ask someone to do something
 - ▶ Commit to doing something
 - ▶ Change the state of the world (performatives)



The big picture II

- We do this by building layers of inference (pragmatics) on top of our understanding of words and how they go together (semantics)
 - ▶ Words have meanings, that can be described through semantic relations
 - ▶ Words describe referents and situations, and can also show the speaker's attitudes
 - ▶ Relations between participants in a situation are linked by semantic roles
 - ▶ Sometimes word meaning is non-compositional, it comes from constructions
 - ▶ The scope of reference can be changed by quantifiers and modification
 - ▶ Utterances are interpreted in context
 - ▶ We assume a cooperative partner
 - ▶ And we care about each others face! 😊 & 😞
 - ▶ Different languages and cultures do this differently



- A skilled writer can use words to tell a story, ...



Further Reading

- **Saeed (2009)** talks about Context in Chapter 7 (including Implicature) and Speech as Action in Chapter 8
- **Kroeger (2022)** talks about Grice & implicature in Chapters 8 and 9, Indirect Speech Acts in Chapter 10.



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Glossary of Key Terms (English–Czech) I

English	Čeština
abuse	zneužití
assertion	tvrzení
bridging	přemostění (v diskurzu)
commissives	komisiva
context / context dependence	kontext / závislost na kontextu
conversational analysis	konverzační analýza
Cooperative Principle	kooperativní princip
declarative	oznamovací (věta)
defeasible	vyvratitelný neplatný za určitých podmínek
deixis	deixe
directives	direktiva
discourse	diskurz
exclamation / exclamative	zvolání / zvolací (věta)



Glossary of Key Terms (English–Czech) II

Explicit Performatives	explicitní performativa
expressives	expresiva
felicity conditions	podmínky felicity
flout	porušit (maximu)
fragment	fragment / výňatek
hedges	zmírňovače / jazykové ohrady
imperative	rozkazovací (věta)
Implicature / implicatures	implikatura / implikatury
Implicit Performatives	implicitní performativa
infelicitous	nefeliční / nevhodný (řečový akt)
interactivity	interaktivita
interrogative	tázací (věta)
lie	lež
Locutionary act	lokuční akt
Maxim of Manner	maxima způsobu
Maxim of Quality	maxima kvality



Glossary of Key Terms (English–Czech) III

Maxim of Quantity	maxima kvantity
Maxim of Relation	maxima relevance
metonymy	metonymie
misfire	selhání (řečového aktu)
Negative Face	negativní tvář
optative	přací (věta)
order	rozkaz
Perlocutionary act	perlokuční akt
Positive Face	pozitivní tvář
Representative	reprezentativ
request	žádost / požadavek
speech acts	řečové akty
synecdoche	synekdocha
Illocutionary act	ilokuční akt
wish	přání
World knowledge	znalost světa

