

April 19, 2004

CLASS 17: MEANING AND DISCOURSE

THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE IN SEMANTICS

Over the years, discourse has become of **increasing concern for semantics** (Norrick 2001).
diachrony of word meaning (Bréal) ⇒ linguistic *signs* (Saussure) ⇒ semantic *fields* (Trier) ⇒
utterance function in context (Bloomfield) ⇒ *compositionality* (generative) ⇒ *symbolic* vs.
emotive meaning (Ogden and Richards) ⇒ *Sapir-Whorf* Hypothesis ⇒ *metaphors* (Lakoff) ⇒
semantic feature theory (Katz and Fodor, Katz and Postal) ⇒ *intensional logic* (Montague) ⇒
truth conditions and *possible worlds* (generative since late 70s) ⇒ *textual* meaning (Halliday)

DEFINITIONS OF PRAGMATICS

The following **attempts at defining pragmatics** are taken from Levinson (1983):

1. Pragmatics is the study of those principles that will account for **why a certain set of sentences are anomalous, or not possible utterances.**
2. Pragmatics is the study of language from a **functional perspective**, that is, it attempts to explain facets of linguistic structure by reference to non-linguistic pressures and causes.
3. Pragmatics is concerned solely with **performance principles of language use.**
4. Pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are **grammaticalized, or encoded in the structure of a language.**
5. Pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory.
[⇒ **PRAGMATICS = MEANING – TRUTH CONDITIONS**]
6. Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are **basic to an account of language understanding.**
[⇒ Pragmatics is the study of the role context plays in speaker- (or utterance-) meaning.]
7. Pragmatics is the study of the ability of language users to **pair sentences with the contexts in which they would be appropriate.**
8. Pragmatics is the study of **deixis (at least in part), implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and aspects of discourse structure.**

GOALS OF A PRAGMATIC THEORY

Levinson (1983) offers the **‘black box’ model of pragmatics**:

- what should be the **input** to such a theory, and what should be the **output**?

- theory of pragmatics: a **function** (in the mathematical sense) which assigns one set of entities (*domain*) to another set of entities (*range*), and the question is what are these entities?

Option I: *input* = the **full grammatical description of a sentence**, together with **information about the context** in which it was uttered — *output* = **a set of representations (or propositions)** which capture the full meaning of the utterance in the context specified.

Option II: Pragmatic theory should be based on the notion of **context change** — the theory is a **function from utterances to contexts**, the contexts brought about by each utterance.

DATA AND DISCUSSION

Partially adapted from Norrick (2001):

- (1) The teacher told the students **he** wanted **them** to pass.
- (2) The father wishes he had been able to instill in the son respect for **himself**.
- (3) The neighbours seem always to try and keep up with **myself**.
- (4)
 - a. The **present king of France** is bold.
 - b. The present king of France is **not** bold.
- (5)
 - a. Mary **killed** John.
 - b. Mary **murdered** John.
 - c. Mary **assassinated** John.
- (6)
 - a. Mary **regrets** that she borrowed John's car.
 - b. **Mary borrowed John's car.**
 - c. Mary **imagined** that she borrowed John's car.
- (7)
 - a. John **knows** that Mary borrowed his car.
 - b. **Mary borrowed John's car.**
 - c. John **believes** that Mary borrowed his car.

<p><u>Some issues:</u> indexicality / deixis & anaphora (trad. syntax) anomaly (accounting for?) knowledge of the world ("encyclopaedic knowledge")</p>

From Levinson (1983):

- (8)
 - a. ??Come there please!
 - b. ??Aristotle was Greek, but I don't believe it.
 - c. ??Fred's children are hippies, and he has no children.
 - d. ??Fred's children are hippies, and he has children.
 - e. ??I order you not to obey this order.
 - f. ??I hereby sing.
 - g. ??As everyone knows, the earth please revolves around the sun.
- (9) Jill wanted to get Bill a birthday present, so she went and found her piggy-bank; she shook it, but there was no noise; she would have to make Bill a present.

Levinson, S. C. 1983. *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [relevant: 1-35]

Norrick, N. R. 2001. Discourse and Semantics. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H. E. Hamilton (eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell, 76-99. [relevant: 76-84]

Readings for next class (NB: Wednesday, same time, different room — A 111!):

D. Schiffrin "Pragmatics" and S. C. Levinson "Conversational Implicature"

Readings for Thursday:

D. Schiffrin "Speech Act Theory" and S. C. Levinson "Speech Acts"