

UNIT 1: DEFINING PRAGMATICS

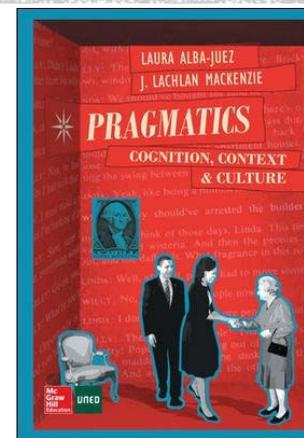
Corresponding to Chapter 1 (Pragmatics:

Definition and Scope) of base book:

Alba-Juez, Laura & Mackenzie, J. Lachlan (2016).

Pragmatics: Cognition, Context and Culture.

Madrid: McGraw Hill



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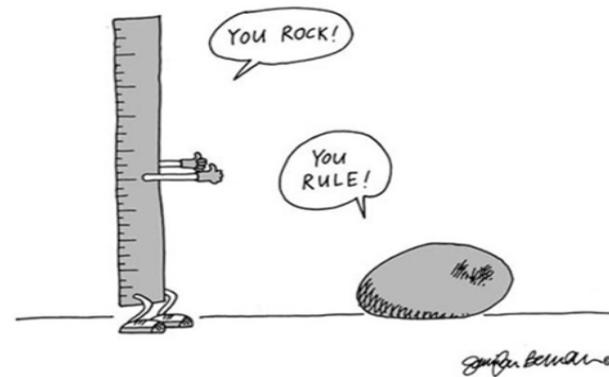
What is Pragmatics and why should we develop pragmatic awareness?

- Pragmatics is a complex, dynamic discipline whose boundaries are far from clear, and which is therefore not easy to define in static, absolute terms.
- It is a sub-discipline of linguistics that can be traced back to the classical traditions of rhetoric and stylistics, but whose status as a modern, independent field of study was not acquired until the first half of the 20th century, when Morris (1938: 21) wrote about the “pragmatic dimension of semiosis” as the “relation of signs to interpreters”.
- Pragmatics deals with meaning, but meaning in pragmatics goes much further than in the field of traditional, truth-conditional semantics. It is to be regarded as a crucial aspect of the whole social, cultural, and cognitive contexts.



- We should therefore distinguish between:
 - a) The basic meaning of an expression resulting from its syntactic structure (i.e. Grice's 1967 *timeless meaning*), and
 - b) What someone means by using that expression in a given situation

It is important to bear in mind, then, that pragmatics is defined with respect to **a speaker or user** of the language.



- In spite of these differences between semantics and pragmatics, the boundaries between them are not clear-cut. They share a great deal of common ground, and far from being opposed, they complement each other and even overlap in some respects.

- Mackenzie (2015) points out that all functional views of language share the assumption that languages in human societies “have the primordial function of permitting sophisticated communication of ideas and feelings” and this is precisely what pragmatics allows us to do: to understand communication by trying to work out not only the literal meaning of words and sentences, but also the hidden, indirect or intended meanings of utterances and/or whole texts.
- Pragmatic knowledge allows us, among other things, to interpret the same utterance in completely opposite ways if said in different situations. Consider a) and b):

a)

Susan: Ann has finally worked out the solution to that difficult math problem.

Peter: *How clever of her!*

b) (Situation: Peter does not like John)

Susan: Ann has finally decided to marry John.

Peter: *How clever of her!*

- Pragmatic knowledge is not only necessary for understanding complex and intricate ironic meanings, but also for simple cognitive/linguistic processes such as disambiguating the real person or thing behind a referring term or a deictic pronoun.
- For instance, knowing the syntactic properties of pronouns in English is not enough to interpret **you** or **him** in utterances like the following:
 - a) **You** and **you**, but not **him**, will come to London with me.

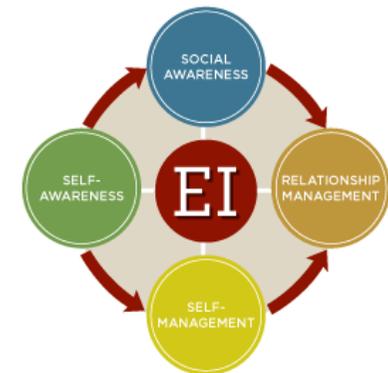
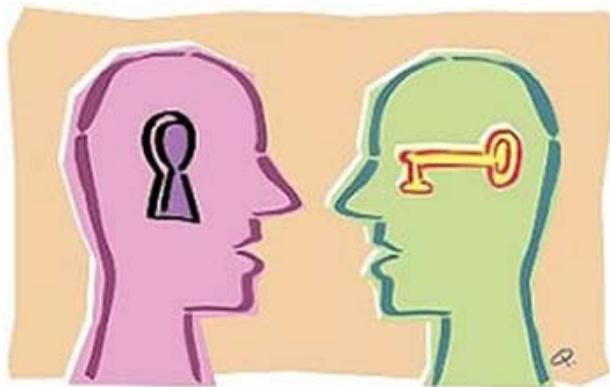
b)



- Normally, the speakers of a language use their pragmatic knowledge (and thus work out the meaning of utterances and whole discourses) in an unconscious way. However, a conscious management of pragmatic resources and strategies can be of great help: a skillful use of these resources will most surely bring about payoffs of various kinds.

- In conclusion:

When it comes to achieving successful communication, developing pragmatic awareness is a crucial factor: Not only is it a sign of high communicative competence, but also of social and emotional intelligence.

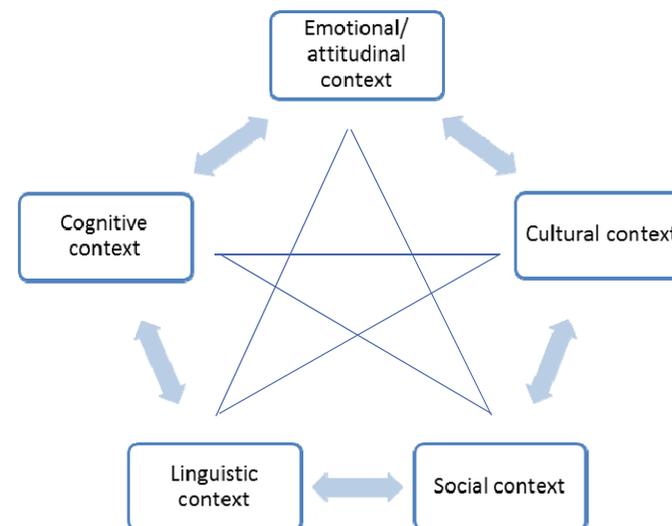


Context: A dynamic concept

- Everything people do, whether they are speaking or not, occurs in a context.
- Context has a powerful effect on discourse, not only for the hearer as he interprets a message but also for the speaker as she formulates it.
- Contexts are far from static: the contextual elements of any given situation may change once or several times in the course of a single conversation or any other type of discourse interaction.



- But what do we exactly mean by context, and what types of context can there be?
- We shall refer to **context** as **both the linguistic and extra-linguistic information affecting the meaning that is finally settled on by both speaker and hearer.**
- Fetzer (2004: 4-12) views context as a multifaceted phenomenon which influences the connection between language and its use, and identifies several types of context, namely the *linguistic*, the *social*, the *socio-cultural* and the *cognitive* context. But apart from these, we believe there is another, very relevant type that should be considered, namely, the *emotional* context
Alba-Juez & Mackenzie (2016: 8):



- The **linguistic context** covers the preceding and upcoming words and sentences that condition the ongoing utterance (sometimes called the co-text) but much more besides. The time and location of utterance are also included in the linguistic context since they affect the understanding of words such as *now* and *here*; so is the identification of the speaker and hearer(s), which determines the interpretation of pronouns like *I* and *you*.
- Whereas it is uncontroversial that current utterances are affected by what went before, it needs to be stressed that predicted follow-up contributions also belong to the linguistic context: for example, the nature of a desired response will determine the form of a question.
- Linguistic context also encompasses more global settings: for example, the genre ‘job interview’ provides a context for (and limits) the exchange that takes place between the candidate and the committee.
- So → **utterances are both constrained by contexts and themselves build new contexts.**

- The **social context** is broader, including such questions as the institutional context in which the interaction is occurring (a school, a doctor's office, a courtroom, etc.).
- These wider contexts entail certain roles and statuses (known as footings), which for instance determine who leads a conversation, who asks the questions, etc.
- Another aspect of social context concerns how participants in an interaction conceive their own identities in terms of seniority, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and so on: clearly, any one person's identity is a complex matrix, different aspects of which will be important in different situations.
- Yet another aspect of the social context affects such fundamental choices as that between spoken and written communication (as well as intermediate forms like chatting, 'whatsapping', etc.) or the possible use of more than one language (code-switching) and/or two varieties of the same language (diglossia).
- Seen from this social perspective, **context is something negotiable, arising from the interaction of human beings who are aware of their multiple roles in society but also are continually manoeuvring towards the achievement of their personal goals.**

- The **cultural context** reflects how the variables of the social context are interpreted from the perspective of a particular culture.
- A culture may align with a specific language community, as when people talk of ‘English-speaking culture’ or with a group of such communities, as in ‘Latin culture’. Alternatively, different cultures can be recognized within different groups speaking (more or less) the same language, for example distinguishing Brazilian and European Portuguese cultures.
- Cultural context can influence such fundamental aspects of language as the understanding of time (for example as linear or not) or of space (for instance as independent of the human body or not).
- At a more micro level, it can determine what associations people have with words: in many cultures, ‘normal’ is evaluated negatively and is associated with notions like ‘ordinary’, ‘run-of-the-mill’, ‘unexceptional’; on the contrary, in Dutch culture, ‘*normaal*’ tends to be evaluated positively in the sense of ‘agreeable’, ‘not irritating’.
- Cultural context is also key to understanding how a community uses language in serious vein for government and religious rituals and in lighter vein for humor and mockery.
- **But cultures are very far from being static or monolithic. The dynamism of modern cultures means that the impact of cultural context on language use is sometimes hard to trace; but no one doubts its powerful influence.**

- The **cognitive context** refers to the mental processes that allow language users to perform within their own social and cultural contexts. This context contains a set of beliefs and assumptions, some of which have the status of facts for particular speakers. These can be expressed as propositions.
- For instance, within any given culture, there will be atheists, agnostics and believers (in very different percentages, of course, depending on the culture under analysis). For the atheists, the proposition ‘God exists’ has the status ‘untrue’; for the agnostics, it has the status ‘may or may not be true’; for the believers, it has the status ‘true’ – in other words, it is a fact. The particular setting of their cognitive context will subsequently affect how they form and interpret utterances about faith, religion and theology.
- One belief that is shared by everyone from the age of three upwards, with the partial exception of sufferers from autism and related conditions, is that **part of the cognitive equipment of other people (and of oneself) is *intentionality*: the desire to inform others, coupled with the desire to have this desire recognized as such by those others.**

- Alba-Juez & Mackenzie (2016) add a fifth type of context that has had increasing attention in recent years, **the emotional-attitudinal context**. Long before we can communicate with language, we are very effective at communicating our emotions as well as our attitudes of acceptance and refusal.
- The impact of emotion on our communication continues through childhood and adult life, providing the engine for our thinking, inspiring our cultures, motivating our sociality and impacting our language in countless ways (Foolen 2012).



- Everything we do is dependent upon our emotional state and our attitudes. Imagine you have a week to write an essay on a poem. The way you go about this linguistic task is ultimately determined by your feelings: How do you feel about the message of the poem? How do you feel about having to write about it? How do you feel about the teacher who gave you the assignment? It is common experience that all these feelings and many more have a decisive impact on how your mind sets to work. Even if your essay is expressed in the 'cool' prose of scholarly discourse, there is a profounder context for the entire experience that is deeply rooted in the processes of your body.
- This emotional-attitudinal context also affects how readers and hearers react: voters may be bombarded with written manifestoes and political broadcasts but ultimately their decision at the ballot box will be determined by their feelings.
- Our memories for the linguistic context, our sensitivity to the social context and our exposure to the cultural context are all mediated by the thinking brain as well as by our emotions and attitudes, but at the same time it can also be said that the language, the society and the culture we are immersed at also shape our cognitive system and our emotions in some way or another.

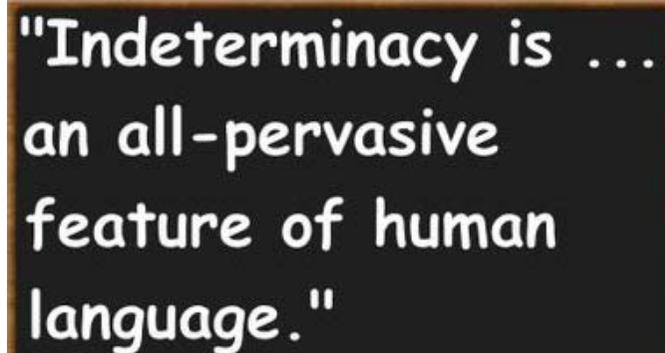
- Hence, it is apparent that utterances cannot be treated in isolation, but as a function of their possible contexts.
- Pragmatic studies include phenomena which reflect the interaction between elements of the purely linguistic context and elements of the more general cognitive, attitudinal and socio-cultural context (e.g. perception, personal and/or cultural beliefs, inference, etc.).
- These phenomena cannot be properly investigated without drawing on the findings of other disciplines, such as Cognitive Science or Sociology, which makes pragmatic studies interdisciplinary.

- In conclusion, **the concept of context is a multifarious and dynamic one, which changes continually and always influences the linguistic product of a discourse interaction. Consequently, it can contain various kinds of interrelated information that is crucial for the characterization of a wide range of pragmatic phenomena such as deixis, reference or implicature.**

CONTEXT
MATTERS

The underdeterminacy of language and its relation to context

- Any given utterance could have more than one possible meaning, depending on the conditions surrounding the speech event.
- Thus, it can be said that most (if not all) linguistic expressions are underdetermined in some way or another, and that their interactive meanings can only be assessed and worked out within a given context.



"Indeterminacy is ...
an all-pervasive
feature of human
language."

Example: I always remember how much at a loss I felt the first time I had to pay for my groceries at an American supermarket, when the cashier asked the underdetermined question “*Paper or plastic?*” :

Cashier: Good morning. Have you found everything you needed Ma’am?

Laura: Yes, thank you. Everything’s fine.

Cashier: Great. Paper or plastic?

Laura: Erm....Excuse me? (Thinking: what in the world could she mean???)

Cashier: P-a-p-e-r o-r p-l-a-s-t-i-c?

Laura: Sorry, but ... Do you mean “Am I going to pay with bills or credit card??”

Cashier: No, ma’am, I mean, “do you want paper or plastic bags for your groceries”?

- In the previous example the meaning encoded in the linguistic expressions used underdetermines the proposition expressed (i.e. what is said). Some authors (e.g. Carston 2002) argue that this is the only type of underdeterminacy that should be covered in Pragmatics. However, other authors (e.g. Grundy 2008 or Huang 2015) include other types within its scope: they also include instances in which
 - a) the linguistic meaning underdetermines what is meant, or
 - b) what is said underdetermines what is meant.

An example of a) would be the sign “Child psychiatrist” (Grundy 2008: 9) on the door of an office in a clinic, where the most retrievable and appropriate interpretation would be that it refers to a psychiatrist who treats children and not to a psychiatrist who happens to be a child, but if we only considered the possibilities given by the logic and grammar of the English language, both meanings are equally possible.

- 2) below is an example of b) above, i.e. what is said underdetermines what is meant. This type of underdeterminacy includes instances of irony, understatement and the like. Compare 1) to 2):

1)

A: *Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas* (the famous sign at the entrance of the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, USA)

2)

A: I didn't know there was so much crime and vice in this city.

B: *Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas.*



- Underdeterminacy is related to ambiguity. Both are properties of everyday language that are important and dealt with in Pragmatics. Huang (2015) provides interesting examples of lexical and syntactic ambiguity which also present underdeterminacy if taken out of their contexts, such as a) and b):

a) John is looking for his glasses

b) They are cooking apples

There are at least two possible interpretations for a): 1) John is looking for his spectacles



, or 2) John is looking for his drinking vessels



As for b), it could be the answer to at least two different questions: 1) What are they doing in the kitchen? Or, 2) What kind of apples are those?



- Possessive constructions in English constitute another case of context-dependent, underdetermined and ambiguous expressions. For instance, if someone is speaking of Lachlan's book, there could be at least four immediate possible interpretations:
 - a) the book that Lachlan wrote or is writing,
 - b) the book that he possesses,
 - c) the book that he is now reading, or
 - d) the book that he is holding in his hand.

Only by having access to the context(s) in which the expression is used can we choose one of these four (or any possible other) alternatives.

The scope of Pragmatics: Main schools and central topics

- Within pragmatic studies, we may find different schools of thought, the two principal ones being a) the Anglo-American school, and b) the European Continental school.

a) The Anglo-American school holds what has been called the component view of pragmatics, because within this conception, Pragmatics is considered to be one more of the core components of a linguistic theory, along with phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. This tradition is represented by authors such as Levinson (1983), Leech (1983), Yule (1996) or Cummings (2005). The central topics of inquiry include implicature, presupposition, speech acts, deixis and reference”. Indeed, the topics alluded to in Huang’s definition are central and unavoidable topics for any researcher in the field, but a great number of scholars believe that this constitutes too narrow a view of Pragmatics.



- **The European Continental** conception of pragmatics is embodied in the work of linguists such as Jef Verschueren, who defines pragmatics as “the cognitive, social, and cultural science of language and communication” (2009: 1), and who consequently advocates a broader view, presenting a functional perspective on all levels of linguistic description and beyond.
- As Bublitz and Norrick (2011: 4) put it, within this broader point of view, Pragmatics is seen as “the scientific study of all aspects of linguistic behaviour”, and as an area of research that is “fundamentally concerned with communicative action in any kind of context”.
- Consequently, according to the Continental view, Pragmatics is not confined within the boundaries of just one linguistic component, but is ‘omnipresent’ in all components and every aspect of linguistic behaviour. This broader view has been more inclined than the component view to consider pragmatic phenomena as linguistic data that necessarily have to be studied in relation to other domains, giving rise to new sub-areas of research such as computational, historical, anthropological or experimental Pragmatics.



- But the above dichotomy of views does not in fact present the real current picture: as Huang (2015) points out, there has been some convergence between the Anglo-American and the Continental traditions, for there has been important work done on topics such as implicature or presupposition from a Continental perspective, and at the same time the Anglo-American school has delved into further research on the relation of Pragmatics to areas such as cognitive psycholinguistics, computational linguistics or neuro-linguistics, just to name a few.
- This convergence was a necessary and fruitful one, for it joins the efforts, knowledge and strengths of both schools, which obviously complement each other. Other authors, such as Ariel (2010) or Mey (2008 [1993]), also adhere to the reconciliation of the component and the perspective views.

- But, again, this dichotomization of the field of pragmatics presents its problems and raises some important questions, such as:
 - a) Can a researcher do micro-pragmatics and relate her findings on the topics of implicature, presupposition, etc. to other non-linguistic social, cultural or clinical phenomena?
 - b) If macro-pragmatics is about ‘the study of language in all aspects’, how does it differ from Discourse Analysis, and why would it be necessary in the first place?

- To the first question we would feel inclined to respond that the answer is ‘yes’, and that we in fact should try to find the relationship between these theoretical topics and their contexts of whatever type. So, again, the boundaries between one view and the other remain blurry and undefined, and it would be limiting to stick to either one of them in a fundamentalist way.
- As for b), it is very likely that, if we define Pragmatics as a discipline that ‘studies language in all its aspects’, we shall immediately start to wonder if there is any use in distinguishing it from Discourse Analysis or even Linguistics (if taken in a broader sense). Thus, while a convergence of both approaches seems desirable, the all-embracing character of macro-pragmatics seems too broad to make Pragmatics a necessary sub-field of Linguistics, distinct from any other.

- Along this line of thought, then, we feel more prone to think that both the findings and objectives of micro and macro-pragmatics are of great use for linguists and discourse analysts, but that, whereas Pragmatics is an indispensable source for the analysis of discourse (Alba-Juez, 2009: 46), it is, however, not the same thing.
- Pragmatics provides discourse analysts with important tools and basic concepts without which their work would be impossible to carry out, but Discourse Analysis is a broader, more empirically-oriented discipline that is not particularly interested in theorizing about, for instance, inferences or deixis (Pragmatics already does that!).
- Among other things, Discourse Analysis includes many schools and traditions (e.g. Critical Discourse Analysis, Ethnography of Communication, etc.) which in our view do not form part of Pragmatics, although they do draw on its findings.

Pragmatics and cognition

- Our ability to function in social and cultural contexts is dependent on our mental capacities. In the approach to the mind favored by Generative Linguistics, questions of communicative context were ruled out as belonging to performance rather than competence. Scholars interested in the cognitive context of communication therefore turned to other traditions, notably functionalism and in particular Pragmatics.
- As a result, these traditions began to thrive, spawning such new fields as Cognitive Linguistics and Discourse Analysis in which the relation of utterances to their social, cultural and cognitive settings is of central importance.

- Cognitive Pragmatics emphasizes how language is inseparably interwoven with the totality of our mind and body. This position has been characterized by Lakoff (1987) as experientialism, a philosophical stance that sees reason as not being objective but rather as arising from our genetic and environmental involvement with the world around us.
- For some scholars in pragmatics, this entails (cf. Cuenca 2003: 2) conceiving “the system ... in a dynamic way, interrelating linguistic structure (syntax), meaning (semantics), language use (pragmatics) and conceptual structure (cognition)”. As a consequence of this view, the advocates of this approach tend not to believe in clear-cut dichotomies (e.g. competence/performance, syntax/semantics, semantics/pragmatics) and rather call for an integration of all linguistic levels along a dynamic continuum.

- One of the trickiest issues in the study of language and cognition concerns the extent to which our conceptualization, i.e. the way we categorize our experience of the world, is determined by the language that we happen to speak.
- Let us take as an example one of the objective properties of a human being: his/her age. For every person I know, including myself, I have in my ‘mental database’ a value for the variable age: “27”, “in her sixties”, “quite a bit younger than me”, etc. When it comes to communicating my own age, an extract from my database, I express it in English by means of the construction *I am n years old* and in Spanish using the construction *Yo tengo n años* (‘I have n years’); other languages have yet other constructions. The question that arises is whether I conceptualize my age differently according as I communicate in different languages: Does the Spanish-speaker regard herself as ‘possessing’ years (as she might possess consumer goods)? Does the English-speaker see himself as to a certain extent old? In any case, it is clear that the two ways of putting it are quite conventionalized – in English, after all, we could say “I have n years”, but we happen not to.

- Where our concepts are more abstract, things get more difficult. In the area of emotions, for example, we talk about our feelings differently according as we are speaking one language or another.
- Bosque (2010) discusses how the Spanish lexicon does not make the distinction between shame and embarrassment, using only the word *vergüenza* for both, and how (in our translation) “the best dictionaries tell us that Spanish *cariño* is love, affection, fondness and tenderness, equivalents that leave any native speaker of Spanish unsatisfied.”
- Indeed, the English word love, both as a noun and a verb, aligns with both the nouns *amor* and *cariño* and the verbs *amar* and *querer* in Spanish; yet no Spanish-speaker would fail to make a distinction between them.
- Bosque goes on to point out that conceptual distinctions in such areas are so language-specific that no theory of emotions can be formulated in an individual natural language because each culture’s emotional life has been shaped by the social history of the speech community.

Indirect meanings: why they are always pragmatic in nature

- One of the most fascinating features of human language is the fact that a single utterance may have many different meanings in different contexts.
- As Grundy (2008: 178) puts it, “When you think about it, it’s really odd that what we mean by our words is more important than what our words mean”.
- And in order to understand what speakers mean by their words, we usually have to put into motion a series of more or less complex inferential processes.
- For instance, when I say the following to my husband, I normally mean something more than what I say. My statement works in fact as a request:

Laura: *We’re running out of peanuts and I have to make peanut butter.*

Gus: Don’t worry I’ll stop by at Majadahonda to buy some this evening. How much do you want me to get?

- Indirectness can also be unintentional (e.g. when a speaker forgets a word and has to give an indirect explanation or definition of it in order to be understood), but this is not the kind of indirectness we are most concerned with in Pragmatics.
- The type of indirect meanings that pragmaticians look into is the intentional one, which is normally produced at the speaker's 'own risk and expense', considering that the indirect utterances produced are 'costly' –in the sense that it takes longer for them to be produced and processed– and 'risky', because the hearer may not understand the meaning(s) the speaker is trying to convey (Dascal 1983).



- In conclusion, a great deal of the meanings we want to communicate are not “said” literally, and therefore have to be reached by the hearer(s) through some kind of cognitive process, namely an inference of some sort. And precisely, what makes it possible for the hearer to make these inferences – apart from his cognitive capacity to process information – is his pragmatic knowledge of the whole discursive situation, i.e., his interlocutor’s identities, the place and time of occurrence of the utterance, their shared background knowledge of the possible environments in which a given utterance may occur, etc.

PRAGMATIC
knowledge

Conventionalized and grammaticalized indirect meanings

Conventionalization: Some constructions which were originally indirect –and therefore in the past required some processing cognitive effort on the part of the hearer to be understood– do not require such effort any longer because the indirect meaning intended has been conventionalized, i.e., it has become an accepted and conventional way of expressing the indirect meaning in question.

E.g.: Could you open the door, please?

Here the speaker is not asking about the ability of the hearer to open the door, but just requesting him to open the door as a favor to the speaker.

More examples → short-circuited implicatures in some ironic/sarcastic utterances:

1)

A: I have won the “Mr. Universe” contest.

B: *Yes, and I’m Marie the Queen of Romania.* (= I don’t believe a word of what you say)

2)

If he is Mr. Universe, I’m the King of France. (= I don’t agree with you or with the proposition expressed by your utterance = NO)

3) A: Do you think our government is corrupt?

B: *Is the Pope Catholic?* (= The answer to your question is obvious: YES)

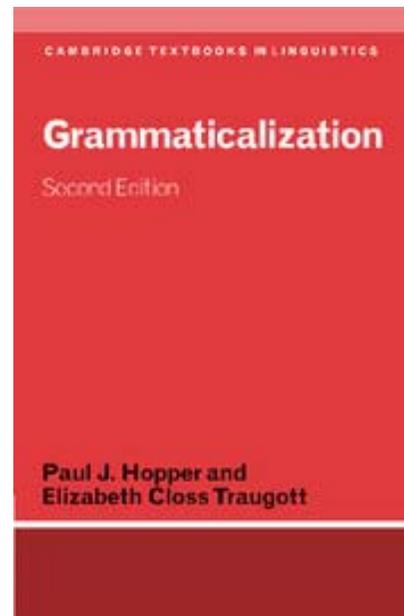
Grammaticalization:

- The process of conventionalization can even go further, to the point that the original indirect meaning becomes deeply ingrained in the grammar of the language.
- Invariability and incompleteness (or 'reduction') are typical signs of what is called grammaticalization, the historical process in which freely associating linguistic forms come to be not just conventionalized but actually incorporated into the grammatical resources of the language.
- For instance, in English, *please* is used as a basic pragmatic marker to preface or follow a polite request (a & b), but can also occur inside a clause, even a subordinate clause (c & d):

- a) **Please**, tidy up this mess.
- b) Tidy up this mess, **please**.
- c) Will you **please** tidy up this mess?
- d) He asked me to **please** tidy up the mess.

Here *please* is the result of grammaticalization. An entire adverbial clause such as *If it please you* (with *please* in the present subjunctive form; we find it in Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, for example) has been worn down to the single word *please*.

- Grammaticalization affects many different areas of the language, not just pragmatic markers.
- Examples of other grammaticalized units are *How about ...?* for suggestions, *Let's ...* for proposals or *You('d) better* for recommendations.
- In all cases, grammaticalization involves the going beyond conventionalization in the sense that inference is no longer involved: what was historically an indirect meaning has become the new direct meaning.



Pragmatics and culture

- Pragmatic studies cannot be independent from cultural studies, given the fact that pragmatic meanings are always sensitive to the context, and therefore culturally situated.
- Human beings can interact in different ways, and most of these modes of interaction are culture-specific.
- When people interact with other members of their own culture, there tends to be less ground for misunderstanding or pragmatic misfires, considering that all participants generally share the same language and the same modes of interaction. This is what has been called *intracultural communication*.
- But communication does not always occur among members of the same culture, which makes it inevitable for the researcher to pose questions about how communication works when individuals pertaining to different cultures have to interact. Grundy (2008: 233) invented the term *trans-cultural* to name any kind of communication that is not intracultural, and he identifies two kinds of trans-cultural communication: a) *Cross-cultural* and b) *Intercultural*

1) Intracultural communication

Communication involving interactants who share a common culture.

A typical situation is when compatriots communicate in their own language, making use of each other's knowledge of their shared culture as a contextual resource.

E.g.: A session in the British Parliament.



2) Cross-cultural communication

Communication where a non-native member interacts with a native member of a particular culture.

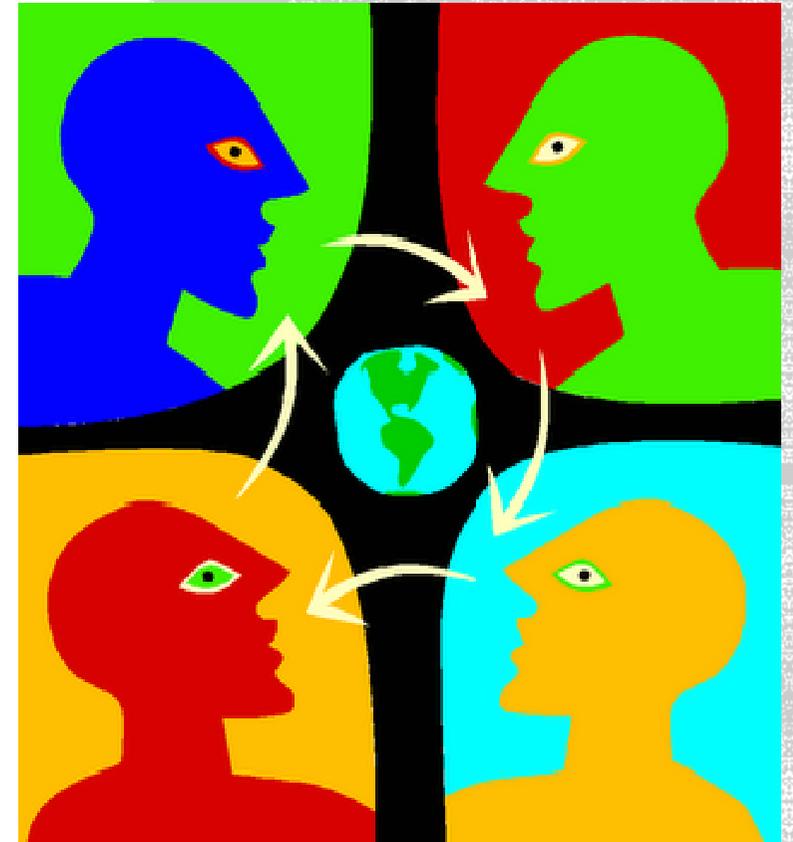
A typical situation is when someone travels to another country and communicates with native members of the local culture in their language.



3) Intercultural communication

Communication when the interactants do not share a common culture.

A typical situation is when someone from one culture meets someone from another culture on neutral ground and communicates in a lingua franca.



Trans-cultural communication

Any communication that isn't intracultural.

This is an umbrella term invented by Grundy for those situations in which we don't need to discriminate between the issues that arise in cross-cultural and intercultural situations. This term is also useful because the distinction between cross-cultural and intercultural communication isn't always easy to draw. For instance, in a conference in the United States where there are Brazilian and Chinese people, describing the ensuing three-way communication as trans-cultural saves us attempting neat distinctions that it's hard to be certain about.



Some examples of cross-cultural and intercultural miscommunication

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ryqNQnzAmBs> (Intercultural Team Experiencing a Culture Clash in the Workplace)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=haohj1sVnyk&feature=related> (Cultural Gaffes Beyond Your Borders)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcEfzHB08QE&feature=related> (Sociology. Cultural differences)

And on the humorous side...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5FFZ5KQiYg&feature=related> (Just for laughs – Cultural shock)

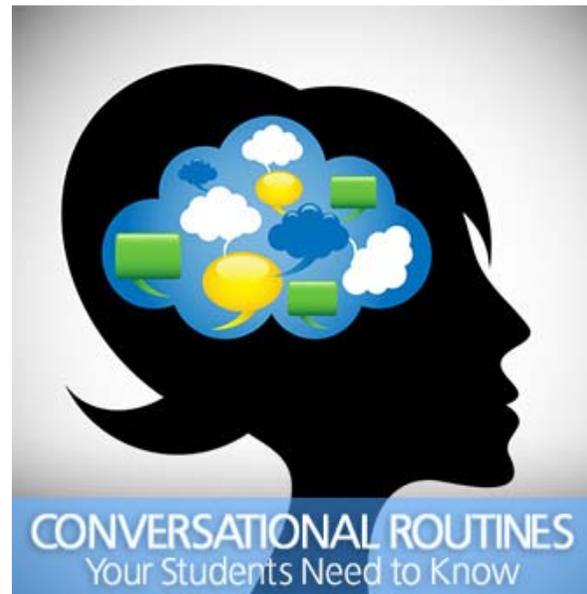
Comparative pragmatic studies:

- Comparing pragmatic systems is no easy task. Many attempts have been made to find universal patterns or a *tertium comparationis* to be used as the basis for comparison.
- Two honorable and very well-known examples of such attempts are Grice's (1975) Maxims of the Cooperative Principle, or Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies. (We'll see this in detail in Unit 4).
- Grice advocates for the existence of four main maxims (Quality, Quantity, Manner and Relevance) of conversation that are universally followed by any speaker of any language, and Brown & Levinson argue in favor of the universality of their model of politeness, which is based on the abstract notion of face.

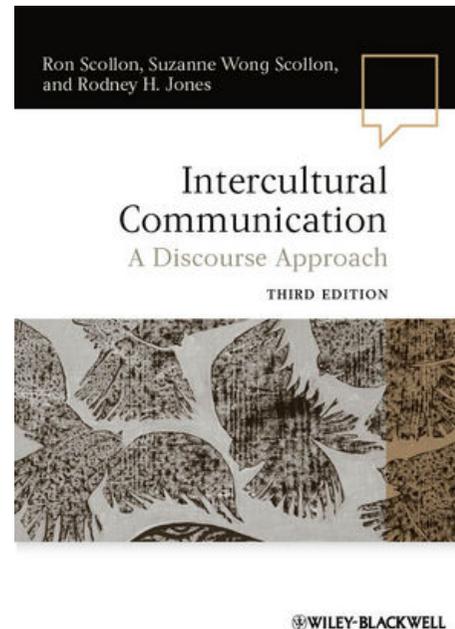
- But contrary to Grice or Brown & Levinson, there are other authors (e.g. Kramsch (1993) or Wierzbicka (2003) who advocate for *cultural relativism* (i.e. the view that the norms are specific to each culture), and have persuasive arguments against the existence of pragmatic universals.
- And even more relativistic are the views of some authors, such as Scollon, Wong Scollon & Jones (2012), who argue against the very concept of ‘culture’, on the grounds that it is a fuzzy and tricky term to define, and consequently cannot be used as the basis for any kind of comparison.



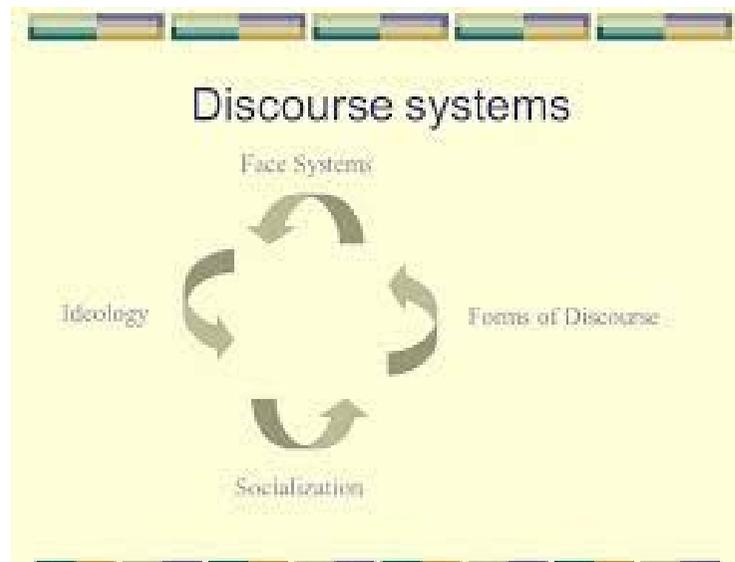
- Coulmas (1981) suggests that most conversational language is predictable, in the sense that our ability to determine how and what to say in a given situation is the product of what we have heard others say in previous interactions. These choices then turn into **routines** which give a sense of authenticity to our speech and make conversation fluent; for this reason, a lack of knowledge or use of such routines would make a participant ‘culturally illiterate’.



- Scollon, Wong Scollon & Jones (2012) point to the fact that what people refer to as ‘cultures’ (be it the Spanish, the Dutch, the English or any other culture) may differ significantly from each other, and that there is hardly any dimension on which cultures could be compared “and with which one culture could be clearly and unambiguously distinguished from another” (2012: 277).
- For this reason, and in order to overcome this analytical obstacle, they have introduced the notion of **discourse systems**, which “are defined in terms of four interrelated components: ideology, face systems, forms of discourse, and socialization” (2012: 277).



- **Discourse systems** are thus complex systems which interact with one another and in which each speaker participates along her life. All of them adopt a given discursive form of expression, and they include the social practices and the values of the group in question, but they will differ for every speaker, even within the limits of the same 'culture': it is interesting to observe and wonder how it is possible for a speaker to have a sense of stable identity when she is navigating across and within all these identity sources (e.g. the discourse system corresponding to her gender, her sexual identity, her country, the historical period she is living in, her work, her hobbies, etc.). This is the reason why Scollon et al try to avoid the term intercultural communication, in favour of **interdiscourse system communication** (2012: 278).



Conclusion (Unit 1)

- The purpose of this unit has been to offer a first impression of Pragmatics. We have seen how this branch of linguistics can be approached both from a broad and a narrow perspective.
- Its focus is always on understanding the fact that we regularly communicate much more than we actually say. The standard dictionary definitions of our words do not cover all the meanings that are conveyed in everyday verbal interaction, which is why we say that these meanings are underdetermined.
- We have also seen the fundamental role of context, and it is here that the breadth of Pragmatics shows itself: so many different levels and types of context conspire in complex ways to invest our words with a richer meaning than they themselves can carry. This has led to the realization that meanings are interwoven with the nature of human cognition and with the social groups and/or cultures in which we live and have our being. Pragmatics thus cannot but overlap with the cognitive and social sciences.