Module Taught: SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

First Year Master Linguistics Students

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Faculty of Letters & Languages

Department: Letters and Foreign Languages

Field: LLE

Level: Master 1 Linguistics Students

Semesters: First & Second

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The Teaching Unit: Fundamental

Section: English

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<tr>
<td>Instructor’s Name: Belarbi Khaled</td>
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Obligatory reading:


Papers:
(1a) „Meaning”
(1b) „Logic and Conversation”
(1c) „Further notes on logic and conversation”


(4) Thomas J. 1995 (and later editions) *Meaning in interaction*.

(See course_xxx_Analogy_handout)

1. Semantics and Pragmatics

**Semantics and pragmatics**

Assumption: Language meaning does not equal speaker meaning.

Questions: (1) Why people mean something different from what they say?
(2) How come hearers understand what speakers mean?

Definition of pragmatics:
- Early 1980s: pragmatics studies meaning in use
  - pragmatics studies meaning in context

  (criticism: e.g. G. Fauconnier 1985: *Mental Spaces*: semantics covers the same area)

- The 1990s and 2000s

**Pragmatics**

speaker meaning (G. Leech 1983) utterance interpretation (Sperber & Wilson 1995)
* social view of pragmatics * cognitive view of pragmatics
* attention on producer * focusing on the receiver
* ignoring social constraints on production

**Jenny Thomas’s view:**
Levels of meaning: a) abstract meaning; b) contextual meaning = utterance meaning; c)
the force of an utterance

**Ad. a:** abstract/semantic/linguistic/decontextualized meaning – not dependent on the domain
of discourse; what language expression could potentially mean
example: *Pearsons are on coke*
  - drink coca-cola
  - use cocaine
  - have solid fuel heating

**Ad. b:** To get to contextual meaning, one has to
1. Assign sense (problems with homonyms (‘coke’), homographs (‘lead’),
2. **Assign reference** (problems with deictic/indexical expressions: place deictics: `here`, `there`, `this`, `that`; time deictics: `yesterday`, `tomorrow`, `now`; person deictics: `I`, `he`, `you`; social deictics: `Madame`, `Your Grace`; discourse deictics: `the former`, `the latter`)

Examples: *And just think, if he hadn’t fallen out of bed, I’d never have found out about it.*
*The old man thinks he’s in love with his daughter.*

- resolve structural ambiguity

- Assigning reference may condition assigning sense and the other way round.

Examples: *out of order*

- **A.** Have you seen the dog bowl?
- **B.** No, but I’ve seen it play several good innings.

- Out of context most sentences are ambiguous. In context – very few are.

Examples: *does a very very great deal of work amongst the immigrant population – I had 16 of `em for lunch …….. last Tuesday.*

*It’s a city where `the banks along the river` has a different meaning from usual.*

- Sometimes ambiguity is intended: party, jokes

**Utterance meaning:** After disambiguation (sense, reference, structure), we have contextual/utterance meaning (a sentence/context pairing = the first component of speaker meaning)

Examples: *`Let him have it, Chris`*

**Ad. c:** Force “A far more important source of difficulty in communication is that we often fail to understand a speaker`s intention” (J. Austin)

force = speaker`s communicative intention

Example: *Is that your car?*

Understanding both (b) and (c) – most common

Understanding (b) but not (c) – common

`Don`t stop doing what you`re doing` - sarcastic, sincere, flattering (?)

Understanding (c) but not (b) – not common

Example: *`toi, toi`*

`Don`t have a cow!`*

Understanding neither (b) nor (c) – rare

Example: *`Her work has become very popular`*

Speaker meaning and speaker intention (force)

- derive force from utterance meaning
- derive force from paralinguistic features (intonation, tone of voice)
- derive force from non-linguistic features (gestures)
- derive force from context

(b) and (c) are closely related but not inseparable

**Definition of pragmatics:**

Speaker meaning: focus on force.

**Criticism:** there is more in communication than just speaker oriented, socially grounded force utterance interpretation.
**Criticism:** no focus on social constraints on utterance production; no answer to the question why somebody is speaking in a particular way.

**Definition:**
*pragmatics = meaning in interaction*

"Meaning is not something which is inherent in the words alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone. Making meaning is a dynamic process, involving the negotiation of meaning between speaker and hearer, the context of utterance (physical, social, linguistic) and the meaning potential of an utterance" (J. Thomas)

**Speech Acts**
J. L. Austin – the father of pragmatics.

**Reasons for his popularity:**
- clear and accessible type of writing;
- consistent line of thought;
- foreshadows many issues important in modern semantics.

**On Austin:** died in 1960, philosopher, 1940s/1950s at Oxford University (H. P. Grice was his pupil; Moore, Ryle, Strawson, Urmson – other ordinary language philosophers); 1952-54 lectures at Oxford University; 1955 – William James lectures at Harvard.

Ordinary language philosophy (from the beginning of the 20th c). A standpoint on the relation between philosophy and language.

G. E. Moore – the language of common sense. People communicate effectively and unproblematically. How it happens?

**Austin:** “Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking in the lifetimes of many generations.”

The opposite view on language at that time – Logical Positivism (Russell, Carnap, Davidson, Tarski). Claim: natural language is defective – ambiguity, imprecision and contradictions. The only meaningful statements are analytic or empirically verifiable. Sentences should be evaluated in terms of truth and falsity: truth-conditional semantics. Unless a sentence can be verified, it is meaningless, e.g. *The King of France is bald.*

**J. Thomas:** consider the following examples
- (1) *An invisible car came of nowhere, hit my car and vanished.*
- (2) *Everyone hates Aileen Elkishow because she’s so popular.*
- (3) *I sleep all the time, doctor.*

No matter what their truth or falsity, we try to make sense of them and we succeed.

Austin: There is more to language than the meaning of its words and phrases. Language is not only for saying things but also for doing them. E.g. commanding, ordering, requesting, inviting (the speaker S uses language to get the hearer H to do something (x)).

**The Performative Hypothesis**
Some statements can be true or false, others cannot. The latter, which cover most utterances, have no truth-conditions and are called performative. Consider
- (4) *I drive a white car.*
  (a statement with truth-conditions, verifiable, potentially true or false = constative)
- (5) *I apologize.*
- (6) *I name this ship the Albatros.*
(7) I bet you $5 it will rain.

(5-7) are all performatives.

**Prototypical performatives**

*I* (1st person singular) **hereby** *Verb* (Present Simple tense)

**Jeeny Thomas**: classification of performatives and verbs:

**I. Metalinguistic performatives**

- self-referential: the verb refers to what the speaker of the utterance is doing;
- self-verifying: the sentence contains its own truth-conditions, it is true by the every fact of being uttered;
- non-falsifiable: the sentences can never be false.

Examples: I say, I promise, I protest, I object, I apologize, I deny, I withdraw (my complaint), I move (that exams be abolished), I thank (the audience for their attention).

Metalinguistic (universal) performatives, apart from being true, are also always felicitous or successful. Thus, they have no felicity conditions.

**II. Ritual performatives are culture dependent.** E.g.

(8) I sentence you to death.

(9) I absolve you from your sins.

(10) I baptize/name...

They have felicity conditions:

- there must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect;
- the circumstances and persons must be appropriate;
- the procedure must be executed a) correctly, b) completely.
- often the persons must have the requisite thoughts/beliefs, feelings and intentions;
- often if a consequent conduit is specified, then the relevant parties must do it.

**III. Collaborative performatives (group performatives)**

- a performative may be successful only if both S/H do something. E.g. I bet you/I challenge you...

If the bet is not accepted, the act is not successful. Other examples: a communiqué from a summit conference; a verdict from a jury.

The categories of performatives overlap. In the case of the majority of speech acts, some uptake is necessary for the act to succeed. This is particularly true in the case of performatives relating to culturally-specific rituals such as baptism or divorce.

The effect of Austin’s insight (that with language you not only make statements but also change reality) revolutionized the way people look at language and led directly to the development of pragmatics as an area of language investigation.

Collapse of Austin’s performative hypothesis (acknowledged by Austin himself):

- No formal way of distinguishing performatives from other verbs (they may be plural or singular, written or spoken, no necessarily in the 1st person or in the active voice). E.g.

  (11) *The court finds the accused not guilty* (person)

  (12) *Your employment is hereby terminated* (person, voice)

  (13) A. *Are you denying that the government has interfered?*

  B. *I am denying that* (continuous)

- The presence of a performative verb does not guarantee that the action is performed. The ritual and collaborative performatives may fail because the requisite felicity conditions do not exist. The supposedly self-verifying ’metalinguistic’ performatives may also fail:

  (14) *I promise I’ll come over there and hit you if you don’t shut up!”*
This is not a promise but a threat.
- There are ways of performing actions without performative verbs: insults, invitations, offering, hinting, boasting, expressing an opinion etc.

Explicit and implicit performatives (introduced in chapter VI of Austin’s book)

Explicit performatives remove a possibility of misunderstanding the force behind an utterance. They are often used in formal and ritual situations and imply an unequal power relationship.

In Chapter 11, Austin abandons the distinction between constatives and performatives. Instead, he introduces the distinctions among

**Locution**: the actual words uttered;

**Illocution**: the force or intention behind the words;

**Perlocution**: the effect of the illocution on the hearer.

Usually, there is a close and predictable connection between locution and perlocution. On the other hand, the same locution can have a different illocutionary force in different contexts:

E.g. “What time is it?”
- tell me the time
- I’m angry because you are late
- It’s time you left

”speech act” - an utterance and the total situation in which the utterance is issued
- illocutionary act/force/pragmatic force

The same words can be used to perform different speech acts and different words may be used to perform the same speech act.

**Conversational Implicature**
The sense usually differs from force
People may mean exactly what they say, more than what they say, less than what they say or the opposite of what they say.


P. Grice’s theory: how a hearer gets from what is said to what is meant; from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning.

**Implicature**
- **conventional** – the same implicature is always conveyed, regardless of context.
  Conventional implicature inducing expressions - ‘but’, ‘even’, ‘therefore’, ‘yet’, ‘for’ (‘She plays chess well, for a girl’).
- **conversational** – what is implied varies according to the context of utterance. E.g. “Great! That’s really great!”

Both types of implicature convey an additional level of meaning, beyond the semantic meaning of the words uttered.

**Implicature versus inference**

**Implicature**: produced by the speaker, intentional. Hinting, suggesting, conveying indirectly.

**Inference**: deducing from the evidence (linguistic, paralinguistic and non-linguistic).

Produced by the hearer.
- A speaker may imply something he or she knows to be untrue and hearers may understand exactly what a speaker has implied without in any sense believing it.
- Grice’s theory attempts to explain how people get from the level of expressed meaning to the level of implied meaning. People often wrongly assume that Grice was trying to explain how inferences are formed, rather than how implicatures are generated and interpreted.

Example:

Thomas: *That`s funny. I thought I put in some new batteries.*
Nephew: [Getting extremely red] *The ones in my engine still work.*

Interpreting the boy’s answer:

Step 1: sense and reference assignment.
Step 2: Working out the speaker’s intention: he was not responsible for the fact that my batteries were flat. Denying guilt.
Step 3: Inference (knowledge about boys, his blushing etc.). He had switched the batteries.

*The Cooperative Principle:*

Make your 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.

**The maxim of quality:** try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

a) do not say what you believe to be false.
b) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**The maxim of quantity**

a) make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange.
b) do not make your contribution more informativr than is required.

**The maxim of relevance**

make your contribution relevant

**The maxim of manner**

a) avoid obscurity
b) avoid ambiguity
c) be brief
d) be orderly

Comment:
- disregard the imperative
- the observation that the speaker has said something which is manifestly untrue, combined with the assumption that the CP is in operation sets in notion the search for an implicature.

**Example:**
The speaker has accidentally locked herself out of her house. It is winter, the middle of the night and she is stark naked.

A. *Do you want a coat?*
B. *No, I really want to stand out here in the freezing cold with no clothes on.*
What can you do with the maxims and the Cooperative Principle?

1. **Observing the maxims**

Husband: *Where are the keys?*
Wife: *They`re on the table in the hall.*

2. **Non-observance of the maxims**

a) flouting or exploiting them (includes maxim clash)
b) violating
c) infringing
d) opting out
e) suspending
**Flouting**

Example 1:
A is asking B about a mutual friend’s new boyfriend.

A. *Is he nice?*

B. *She seems to like him.*

Example 2:
A. *I lived in the same house as that man for three years and he’s the man I hate most in all the world. In all my greasy past, he is the biggest greasy spot.*

**Violating**

Unostentatious nonobservance of a maxim: cheating and misleading. Trials, parliamentary speeches and arguments. Very often it happens that one tells the ‘truth’ to imply ‘untruth’. In flouting, it works the other way round – tell the untruth to implicate the truth.

**Infringing**

A speaker who, with no intention of generating an implicature and with no intention of deceiving, fails to observe a maxim is said to ‘infringe’ the maxim – reason: imperfect command of the language, nervousness, drunkenness, excitement etc.

**Opting out**

Expressing unwillingness to cooperate (e.g. in public life). Example:

”Well, honestly, I can’t tell you a thing, because what was said to me was told me in confidence.”

Opting out confirms the psychological reality of Grice’s CP.

**Suspending**

With the Malagasy speaker the maxim of quantity is suspended. They give less information than is expected of them. The uninformativeness is systematic, motivated and it generates no conversational implicatures for members of the community. In Navajo: there is the taboo of not speaking the name of the dead.

Suspension of the maxims may be culture-specific or specific to particular events: funeral orations, poetry, telegrams, phone calls, jokes etc.

**Testing for implicature**

-nondetachability and non-conventionality

Detachability would consist in the possibility of relexicalization [replacing one word or phrase with another] or reformulation with the same sense preservation.

In the case of conversational implicatures (with the exception of those arising from flouting manner), no such possibility exists.

However, what begins as a conversational implicature may become conventionalized and finally semantic:

*God be with you* [Catholic] ---- *farewell formula* ---- *goodbye*

Sometimes the movement from a phrase conveying a conversational implicature, via conventional implicature to semantic meaning can occur very quickly.

1980s: ‘creative accounting’ = ‘cheating’

‘being economical with the truth’ = ‘lying’
Conversational implicatures change from context to context. They belong to utterances and not to sentences.

Example 1: A young boy is talking to a colleague of his father

A: It’s my birthday today.
B: Many happy returns: How old are you? [request for information]

Example 2:

A. How old are you, George?
B. I’m eighteen, Father.
A. I know how old you are, you fool. [reprimand]

Example 3: A psychologist is talking to a woman patient.

A. What do you do?
B. I’m a nurse, but my husband won’t let me work.
A. How old are you?
B. I’m 39. [advice to be more mature]

- **Calculability**
  It is possible to spell out all the steps a hearer goes through in order to calculate the intended implicature.

- **Defeasibility**
  A conversational implicature may be cancelled. The possibility of canceling or denying an implicature is the most important reason why people choose to use it.

### Rules versus principles

**Searle**: “the hypothesis of this book is that speaking a language is a matter of performing speech acts according to systems of constitutive rules.” (1969:38)

Pragmatics seeks different generalizations than grammar does. Grammar (phonology, syntax, semantics) is governed by rules while pragmatics is constrained by maxims or principles.

The differences between rules and principles:

1. **Rules are all or nothing, principles are more or less.**
   - Rule: subject/verb concord – applies or not.
   - Principles (maxims): e.g. manner – can apply in varying degrees. The same with quantity or politeness.

2. **Rules are exclusive, principles can co-occur.**
If you use one rule, you cannot use another (e.g. pronominalization). Maxims, e.g. manner and quantity may co-occur; politeness and truthfulness may co-occur mediated by employing indirectness.

3. Rules are constitutive, principles are regulative.
   * Constitutive rules define a system (bishop’s movements in chess)
   * Regulative principles regulate a system (do not sacrifice your queen for a pawn)

Descriptive grammars provide constitutive rules, telling us what sequences of words are grammatical sentences. Pragmatic principles show how people make choices from within the grammatical system in order to achieve their goals.

4. Rules are definite, principles are probabilistic.

Rules should not have counterexamples. If they do, the rules should be reformulated. To pragmatic principles there may be counterexamples.

5. Rules are conventional and pragmatic principles are motivated.

Rule: ‘I’m coming, aren’t I?’ (Arbitrary)

Principle: politeness – used if so chosen.

Example of the division of labour between rules and principles: the English pronominal system.
- human beings – gender specific pronouns (grammar)
- unborn or very young children – it (pragmatics)
- dead men – it
- insects – it
- mammals – “cow”: gender-specific or neutral pronoun (grammar); the choice (pragmatics)

The grammar of the language tells us what forms are available, while a variety of pragmatic factors (cognitive, psychological, social, affective and interpersonal) influence the choice we make.

**Pragmatics and indirectness**

Indirectness occurs when there is a mismatch between the expressed meaning and the implied meaning. Indirectness is a universal phenomenon.

* The interest in pragmatics is in intentional indirectness
* Indirectness is costly and risky
* Assumption: speakers are rational
  - Indirectness brings some social and/or communicative advantage
  - We ignore the possibility that X cannot be expressed

*Indirectness is costly*: it takes longer for the speaker to produce and longer for the hearer to
process.

*Indirectness is risky:* the hearer may not understand what the speaker is getting at.

Example 1:

B (non-native speaker of English, loves West Side Story and has listened to the sound track twice in one evening)

A: *Would you like to listen to something else now?*

B: *No.*

*Indirectness is rational:* avoid hurting someone, avoid appearing `pushy`, show how clever they are, avoid a taboo word or topic – thus achieving his or her goal or avoiding unpleasantness.

*The principle of expressibility:* “anything that can be meant can be said”. Reasons for this principle to be broken:

- linguistic inadequacy
- performance errors
- some concepts may be beyond our (= human) present understanding (e.g. *Does the present/love exist?*)

Example of indirectness:

A note sent by the Department Secretary to a research student one Friday afternoon:

*Dear Beulah,*

*A research student named x from Zambia is arriving at Manchester tomorrow at 19.30. She`s got a room booked in County College and I don`t know whether she will have any money or not. She can see me on Monday morning and we`ll sort things out.*

Reason for indirectness: the secretary had no right to tell the student to take care of the newcomer.

Follow up exercise: Give your own example of indirectness

Individuals and cultures vary widely in how, when and why they use an indirect speech act in preference to a direct one. However, the axes governing indirectness are `universal` in that they capture the types of consideration likely to govern pragmatic choices in any language.

Factors influencing indirectness

1. The relative power of the speaker over the hearer
2. The social distance between the speaker and the hearer
3. The degree to which X is rated an imposition in culture Y
Relative rights and obligations between the speaker and the hearer.

Follow up exercise: Give examples of indirectness influenced by the four factors above (one for each factor).

**Power**

- more indirectness towards authority figures (for want of reward power and for fear of coercive power). Especially visible in hierarchical settings (courts, the military, the workplace). On the other hand, power is present to a degree in all relationships:
  - legitimate power – right to prescribe or request by virtue of role, age or status;
  - referent power – one person has power over another because the other admires and wants to be like him/her in some respect;
  - expert power – one person has some special knowledge or expertise which the other person needs.

- **Legitimate power:** (like reward and coercive) fairly constant within a relationship, most subject to cross-cultural variation. Explicit reference to such power may be expected (‘I’m your mother, I have a right to know’).

- **Referent power:** often not exerted consciously. Sometimes teachers or priests are obliged to act as a suitable model – pop stars, sports idols.

- **Expert power:** more transient than in other types (computer expert or cook).

**Social distance**

(Leech 1983, opposite of ‘solidarity factor’) composite of psychologically real factors (status, age, sex, degree of intimacy etc.). If you feel close to someone (age, family, friendship, social class, occupation, sex), you feel less need to employ indirectness.

Compare: ‘*Got change of fifty pence, DB?*’

‘*Excuse me, could you change fifty pence for me? I need tens or fives for the coffee machine.*’

It may be difficult to distinguish between power and social distance and sometimes the two are conflated. Very often they co-occur – we tend to be socially distant from those in power over us, though there are exceptions.

**Size of imposition**

How great is the request you are making? The greater it is the more indirectness it tends to involve.

Compare: ‘*Shut the window, Jen*’

‘*Do you think you could find the time to take those invitations to the printers?*’

‘free goods’ - anyone can use without seeking permission. Minimal degree of indirectness.
‘non-free goods’ - the opposite
‘taboos’ - usually sexual or religious topics, bodily functions.

**Rights and obligations**
Cases when a speech act involving a major imposition is performed with a minimal degree of indirectness.

Example: woman 1: *Next stop, driver!* (obligation)

woman 2: *Do you think you could possibly let me out just beyond the traffic lights, please?* (no obligation)

Example: policeman 1 (official): *Move this vehicle.* (right)

policeman 2 (private): *Could you move over a bit so that I could park?* (no right)

**The negotiation of pragmatic parameters**
Arguments about relative power, rights and obligations.

Example: reducing the size of the imposition – A is just going off to university. B is her mother.

A. *Mum. You know those browny glasses?*
B. *Mm.*
A. *The ones we got from the garage.*
B. *Mm.*
A. *Do you use them much?*
B. *Not really, no.*
A. *Can I have them then?*

Example: reducing the social distance - D is a visiting academic. He is meeting J for the first time.

J. *Dr Galasinski?*
D. *Darek*
J. *Darek*

A sociolinguist would look at language use to see how it reflects social relations, a pragmaticist would look at the way people use language in order to change (or maintain) social relationships.

**Measuring indirectness**

*After Weizman 1989:* indirectness is … not just as a lack of transparency, such as with the use of unusual words or ambiguous deictic references, but as lack of transparency specifically and intentionally employed by the speaker to convey a meaning which differed, in some way,
from the utterance meaning. The key notion here is that of the intended exploitation of a gap between the speaker’s meaning and the utterance meaning.

Indirectness: (1) utterance level (prepositional transparency/opacity)
(2) the level of illocutionary force (of what is implied)
(3) the directness of achieving the illocutionary goal

Example: choirmaster
- to boys: ‘Stand!’ (direct imperative)
- to adults: ‘Would you like to stand?’ (conventionalized polite request)
- to the public: ‘I think we would sing better if we stood’ (less direct, requiring more processing)

**Wilson/Sperber (1981):** degree of indirectness = amount of the hearer’s processing cost.

Usually, the level of indirectness is correlated with the activity type interlocutors are engaged in. Activity types have their own norms of interaction and participants have particular expectations, which constrain the possible range of interpretation of utterances and implicatures. Even the most apparently straightforward reply can cause problems unless uttered against a background of shared norms and conventions (e.g. Marriage proposal and reactions to it). The potential for constructing an implied premise depends also on the beliefs we have. If they differ between participants there may be misunderstandings:

A. **Will you marry me?**
B. **I will not marry a complete buffoon.**

If we differ in what we know, we may also have problems. What one person is able to retrieve from memory, another may have to construct.

Example: (joke)

Question: **What’s the difference between Oxford University and ‘Jurassic Park’?**
Answer: **One’s a theme park inhabited by dinosaurs, the other’s a film by Steven Spielberg.**

Without background knowledge one could not construct any deductions allowing to understand the joke.

Co-text = the linguistic (not situational) context in which an utterance occurs. For example, adjacency pairs (i.e. consecutive, contingently related utterances produced by two different speakers) – constraints on interpreting indirectness.

Example:

A. **Are you coming to the cinema?**
B. I’ve got an exam tomorrow. (an answer to yes/no question)

If there are no constraints on the interpretation of indirectness, then the process is more difficult.

Example: J. Thomas talking to a friend in the (then Soviet) Ukraine.
   A. I’d like to go walking on Saturday if it’s fine.
   B. It’s Lenin’s birthday.
   A. It’s my niece’s birthday. And Shakespeare’s birthday.

Another factor influencing the interpretation of indirectness is the goal of an exchange.

Example:
   A. Switch on the heater! (goal – to feel warm)
   A. Cold in here, isn’t it? (goal – to feel warm)

Thomas (p. 140): “the speaker will always bear in mind the interpretive steps the hearer will have to take in order to interpret what is said, and this will be a powerful constraint on the way the speaker formulates his utterance. Similarly, the hearer will necessarily take account of the social (and other) constraints upon him or her. Knowing, or guessing the goals often shortens and simplifies the interpretation.

Example: A professor telephones room-permits office:
   A. Do you have a room for 20 on Monday nights?
   B. Just a minute. Yes, I do. Give me your name, department and course number, please.

Sometimes, if you don’t know the goal you have problems with interpretation.

Example: A woman (A) came to my door, and, pointing to the car parked outside my house, asked:
   A. Is that your car?
   B. Why do you want to know?

Reasons for using indirectness

(1) Interestingness
- (the least significant reason) Enjoying having fun with language;
- being uninteresting or deflecting interest on purpose.

(2) Increasing the force of one’s message
- especially true of jokes, irony and poems

(3) Competing goals

(4) Politeness/regard to face

In all the cases, there is an utterance level reluctance to be critical, suggestive or over-explicit
The Construction of meaning:
Pragmatics is crucially different from grammar:
* different generalizations (principles or maxims)
* motivated: people have reasons for speaking as they do
* dynamic: people often use language to bring about change
* making meaning (negotiating meaning in interaction)

Questions:
A. Is pragmatics part of linguistics?
B. How does pragmatics differ from sociolinguistics?
A. Pragmatics is part of linguistics. It focuses on:
- assigning meaning in context
- utterance meaning
- force (speech acts)
- implicature
- indirectness
- negotiating meaning between Speaker and Hearer
B. Sociolinguistics: systematic linguistic correlates of relatively fixed and stable social variables (region of origin, social class, ethnicity, sex, age…) on the way an individual speaks (static, what resources there are).

Pragmatics: linguistic correlates of relatively changeable features of that same individuals (such as relative status, social role) and the way in which the speaker exploits his/her (socio)linguistic repertoire in order to achieve a particular goal (dynamic, parasitic upon sociolinguistics, what resources are chosen)

Sociolinguistics/pragmatics overlap: turn-taking, code switching, maxims of indirectness.

Activity types versus speech events
- examining the effect of context on language:

Sociolinguistics: looks for systematic linguistic correlates of social and contextual variables.

Context (Hymes, 1962 “The ethnography of speaking”) SPEAKING – (=speech event):
situation (physical or abstract setting), participants, ends (goal), act sequences (message form, message content), key (tone, manneror spirit of act – serious, ironic etc),
instrumentalities (channel, form – dialect, accent etc), norms (of interpretation and interaction), genre (joke, lecture, advertisement…). No room for explaining how one speaker successfully exploits a situation to achieve his goal, while the other fails.
Taking `speech event` further and elaborating on it:

**Levinson (1979) activity type**: “a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting… on the kinds of allowable contributions.” E.g. teaching, job interview, jury interrogation, football game, task in a workshop, a dinner party.

Hymes sees context as constraining the way the individual speaks. Levinson sees the individual`s use of language as shaping the `event`.

**Sociolinguistics**: how features of context systematically constrain language use.

**Pragmatics**: how speakers use language in order to change the situation they find themselves in.

**J. Thomas` description of an activity type:**
- the goals of the participants
- allowable contributions
- the degree to which Gricean maxims are adhered to or are suspended (depending on culture and activity type)
- the degree to which interpersonal maxims are adhered to or are suspended (e.g. modesty)
- turn-taking and topic control (to what degree can an individual exploit turn-taking norms in order to control an interaction)
- the manipulation of pragmatic parameters (increasing or decreasing social distance, power, rights and obligations, size of imposition, the level of formality of the situation by register shifts)

Context cannot be seen only as `given`. The participants contribute to making and changing their context. Similarly, pragmatic meaning is something which is constructed between Speaker and Hearer.

**The construction of meaning**

**Pragmatic ambivalence** (Leech, Brown and Levinson)

Example: `Is that a phone?` - question or request
Example: `Would you like to come in and sit down?` (invitation, request, directive, either)

Ambivalence – Speaker does not make clear precisely which of a range of related illocutionary values is intended. While the force is unclear, the illocutionary goal is clear.

**The collaborative nature of speech acts**

Not only “collaborative” speech acts are collaborative but virtually all of them are. Exceptions – performatives of the `I sentence you`, `I order you` type.
The negotiability of force
A speech act often has the potential to be either an offer or a question. For example, which one it is may depend on the hearer.

Example:
A. Tea or coffee?
B. Coffee, please.

Example:
A. Tea or coffee?
B. Yes, please
A. Coffee?
B. Thank you.

Preparing the ground for a speech act

Example: preparing the ground
A is trying to watch television. His daughter, B, is sitting on the settee.
A1. Do you want to change places?
B1. I`m OK
A2. I can`t see the television
B2. Can`t you?
A3. Get off the settee!
The extreme directness of A`s final utterance is only explicable in the context of his two previous attempts to get his daughter to move.

Successive utterances in situated discourse
The pragmatic force of successive utterances can have a cumulative effect. Very often the interpretation of utterances later in the discourse is influenced by the force the hearer has assigned to earlier utterances.

Example:
Husband: So you`re sure you`ll be all right?
Wife: What, Basil?
Husband: I said you`re sure you`ll be all right?
Wife: Will you get me my bed jacket?
Discoursal ambivalence

Utterances may be ambivalent not only in their illocutionary force but also in their discoursal function. Assigning meaning is an active (dynamic) procedure. The hearer partly constructs the meaning by hypothesis formation and testing, by making meaning on the basis of likelihood and probability, often constructing a context. Evidence in pragmatics consists in the language produced – pronoun choice, address forms choice, use of indirectness. Evidence is difficult to get for motivation, indeterminacy of meaning and of pragmatic force, informal reasoning concerning Gricean and interpersonal maxims. Here we appeal to the intuitions of the analyst or retrospection on the part of interlocutors. These, however, are subjective. Other type of pragmatic evidence comes from:

- The perlocutionary effect of an utterance on the hearer
- explicit commentary by the speaker
- explicit commentary by someone other than the speaker
- subsequent discourse
- co-text (raising directness level)

The evidence is not conclusive but probabilistic


I. Organization of the paper
A. Data: Two ways of using the word „mean”
   Tests: natural language evidence for the existence of two types of meaning
   Terminology: naming the two ways of using the word „mean” (= two types of meaning)
B. Defining the two types of meaning via defining meaning
   Causal theory of meaning and its criticism
   P. Grice’s definition of meaning (the process of finding the correct definition is shown)

II. Summary of the paper
A. Data: Two ways of using the word „mean”

Non-natural (conventional) meaning: Natural meaning linguistic and non-linguistic

Those 3 rings on the bell(x) mean that the bus is full (p)

The remark „Smith couldn’t get on without his trouble and strife” (x) meant that Smith found his wife indispensable(p)

These spots (x) mean measles (p0)

The recent budget (x) means that we shall have a hard year (p)

-x doesn’t entail p
-x entails p

possible paraphrase: what was meant by x
impossible paraphrase: what was meant
(x was „produced” intentionally) was p by x was p
- possible paraphrase: S (speaker) meant by x that p
- possible paraphrase: Those three rings on the bell mean „the bus is full”
- possible paraphrases: possible paraphrase: S means to do so and so (by x)
      S means something by x
      S means by x that ...

B. P. Grice’s defining meaning

- x means something (that so and so)
- S means by x something (that so and so)

x - an informative descriptive utterance
(1) x was intended by the speaker to induce a belief in the hearer
(2) to say what the belief is is to say what x meant nn
Counterargument: the handkerchief example
Correction:
(3) S wants H to recognize S’s intention of (1)
Counterargument: A child lets his mother see how pale he is (x) (so that she might help). X doesn’t mean „asking for help”;
Spontaneous or deliberate frowning as a sign of displeasure.
Correction:
S means something by x iff
(1) S intends x to produce a belief in H
(2) S intends h to recognize (1)
(3) only when H recognizes S’s intention of (2) can he come to have the belief in (1)

„S uttered x with the intention of inducing a belief by means of the recognition of this intention”
Example: I want to get rid of a very avaricious man
mean: I point to the door; I give him a push
mean: I throw a pound note out of the window

Example: A policeman stops a car
mean: by waving
mean: by standing in its way

Summary:
(1) S meant something by x = S intended the utterance of x to produce some effect in h by means of the recognition of this intention
(2) X meant something = somebody meant something by x
(3) x means that so and so = what people intend to effect by x = the intended effect must be within the control of the audience

Recognition of the intention is a reason (not a cause) of the effect. Only the primary intention of a speaker is relevant to the meaning of an utterance.
- x means what its speaker normally intend to convey. Diverging from the general usage needs special treatment.
- contexts determine the choice of intention
- linguistic intentions are much like non-linguistic ones

**B. Causal theory of non-natural meaning**

x means something = a) x produces some attitude in the audience
   b) x is produced by the same attitude in the speaker

a/b come about by „an elaborate process of conditioning attending the use of the sign in communication”

Counter examples:
1) Putting on a tailcoat
2) x: John is an athlete
   something: John is tall

- no possibility to speak about what a particular speaker means by a sign on a particular occasion.


**I. Organization of the paper**
1. Differences between logic and natural language;
2. Attitudes to (1): formalists, informalists, H.P. Grice;
3. Saying and implicating;
4. Conventional meaning of words;
5. The Cooperative Principle and its maxims;
6. What can we do with the CP and its maxims?
7. Conversational vs conventional implicatures.
8. Examples;

**Ad.1 Differences between logic and natural language**
- Formal devices: ¬, ∧, ∨, ′, (x), (x), ix
- Natural language devices: not, and, or, if, all, some, the

Example: and - He went home and watched TV
   He watched TV and went home
   or - He likes ice creams or cheese
   not - The king of France isn’t bald

**Ad. 2. Attitudes to (1)**
- **Formalists:** - interested in patterns of valid inference
  - formal devices are „better”: allow for (1) generalizations; (2) deciding about dubious cases;
  - natural languages are imperfect: they escape clear cut definitions and truth evaluation;
  - solution: construct an ideal language to secure the foundations of science.
- **Informalists:** - scientific inquiry is not that important. We understand language without knowing its analysis
  - we should look for the conditions of use of the language;
  - solution: construct logic of natural language.
- P.H. Grice: - there are no divergences between logic and natural language. You see that they don’t exist if you analyze conditions governing conversation.

Ad. 3. Saying and implicating
Example: A. *How is C getting on in his job?*
   B. *Oh, quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues and he hasn’t been to prison yet.*
- implicate, implicature, implicatum
- say: conventional meaning of the words used
Example: *He is in the grip of a vice*
- In between „implicate” and say” we have:
  * referent assignment (*he(?)*)
  * time specification
  * disambiguation („in the grip of a vice”)

Ad. 4. Conventional meaning of words
- utterances (words) conventionally implicate:
Example: *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave*
If conventional implicatures fail, the sentence may still be true. They are non-truth-conditional

Ad. 5. The Cooperative Principle and its maxims
The CP: 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

**Quantity:** (1) Make your contribution as informative as is required;
   (2) Do not make it more informative than is required.

**Quality:** (1) Do not say what you believe to be false
   (2) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence

**Relation:** Be relevant

**Manner:** (1) Avoid obscurity of expression;
   (2) Avoid ambiguity;
   (3) Be brief;
   (4) Be orderly

The most important maxim: Quality: only if this is observed, may the others be observed.
There may also be other maxims: aesthetic, social, moral (e.g. be polite)

**Talking:** purposive, rational behavior - an empirical fact
- common, immediate aim;
- interdependence of exchange;
- assumption of continuation

**Assumption:** talk exchange is profitable if the participants adhere to the CP and the maxims.
p. 142: „I am fairly sure that I cannot reach this conclusion until I am a good deal clearer about the nature of relevance and of the circumstances in which it is required.”

Ad. 6. What can we do with the CP and the maxims?
(1) violate;
(2) opt out;
(3) maxim clash;
(4) flout or exploit.

Ad. 7. Conversational versus conventional implicatures
S saying that p has conversationally implicated that q if:
(1) S is presumed to be observing the CP and the maxims;
(2) To accept (1) we must assume that S has implicated that q;
(3) S thinks (and assumes that H thinks) that H may work out that q.

Conversational implicatures have to be worked out. To work them out, H must know:

(1) conventional meaning of p;
(2) referents;
(3) CP and the maxims;
(4) context;
(5) background knowledge;
(6) assumption of mutual knowledge of (10-(5).

Ad. 8. Examples

(1) No maxim violated
   (a) A. I am out of petrol.
       B. There is a garage round the corner.
   (b) A. Smith doesn’t seem to have a girlfriend these days.
       B. He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

(2) Maxim clash
   (a) A. Where does C live?
       B. Somewhere in the south of France.

(3) Maxim exploitation
   - Quantity
     (a) „Dear Sir, Mr. X’s command of English is excellent, and his attendance at tutorials has been regular. Yours, etc.”
     (b) Women are women.
     (c) War is war.
   - Quality
     (a) Irony: „X is a fine friend”.
     (b) Metaphor: „You are the cream in my coffee”.
     (c) Meiosis/understatement: „He was a little intoxicated.
     (d) Hyperbole/overstatement: „Every nice girl loves a sailor”.
   - Relevance
     (a) A. Mrs. X is an old bag.
       B. The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn’t it?
   - Manner
     (a) I sought to tell my love, love that never told can be.
     (b) I have Sinned/sinned.
     (c) obscurity in the presence of children.
     (d) Miss X produced a series of sounds....

(1-3) - particularized conversational implicatures: saying that p on a particular occasion in virtue of special features of the context.
- generalized implicatures: p normally implicates that q (in the absence of special circumstances): examples - a) X is meeting a woman this evening
   b) X went into a house yesterday and found a tortoise inside the front door
Ad. 9. Testing for conversational implicatures:
(a) cancelability;
(b) non-detachability;
(c) non-conventionality;
(d) non-truth-conditionality;
(e) indeterminacy.


I. Summary
(1) Total signification = what is said + what is implicated
   = what is part of the conventional force (meaning) and what is not
(2) Triple division:
   (a) what is said;
   (b) what is conventionally implicated;
   (c) what is non-conventionally implicated.
(3) (a) The CP and the maxims are usually observed;
    (b) The assumption in (a) is in systematic correspondence with conversational implicatures;
    (c) The assumption in (a) is non-trivial, i.e. assumptions that a particular maxim is observed are not included in it:

Moore’s paradox: S says that p = S expresses the belief that p. Yet, S does not implicate that he believes that p.

P. 42: „In saying that p a speaker of course commits himself to its being the case that he believes that p; this commitment is not a case of saying that he believes that p; yet, it is bound up with saying that p.” (connection with the indicative mood)

Additional example: NY and Boston were blacked out the previous night. A asks B whether C saw a particular TV program. B says: No, he was in a blacked-out city (by the maxim of relation). B probably wouldn’t say: He was in NY, which was blacked out (the gain is insufficient to justify the additional conversational effort)

(4) testing for implicature:
   (a) calculability;
   (b) cancelability;
   (c) detachability
   (d) truth-conditionality

The tests are non-decisive for distinguishing between conventional and conversational implicatures.

Examples:
(1) Conversational implicatures are non-detachable; they are carried because of what is said and not by virtue of the manner of expression. „The implicature is non-detachable insofar as it is not possible to find another way of saying the same thing which simply lacks the implicature”
A tried to do X/A attempted to do X/A endeavored to do X/A set himself to do X - A failed to do X.
If the implicature depends on the manner in which something is said then it is conversational but detachable.
There may be no alternative way of saying what is said: then an implicature is non-detachable out of necessity. Entailments/presuppositions and conversational implicatures are both non-detachable. So the test is not conclusive; eg. A. *He has left off beating his wife.* Detachability allows us to distinguish between certain conventional implicatures and non-conventional ones.

(2) Conversational implicatures are cancelable
S says that p but not: „implicature”
S says that p but I do not mean to imply that: „implicature”
S says that p but the implicature is contextually cancelled.

Using words in a loose or relaxed way: e.g. buying a tie of medium green.
A. *It is a light green now*
B. *It has a touch of blue in it in this light*
C. *It looks light green now.*
The implicature of A and B: The tie is not medium green

„or”
If we assume the exclusive disjunction, then the „exclusive” part of meaning is cancellable and so is the implicature: „I don’t know ...”
Example: *The prize is either in the garden or in the attic. I know that because I know where I put it.*
- weak (truth-functional) „or”: no implicature to the effect that I don’t know which (p or q).
- strong (non-truth-functional) „or”: there is such an implicature.
- Grice: strong „or” is derivative from the weak one
- S: p or q : S is not in a position to make a stronger statement and S has evidence for accepting p or q, without knowing which one.
- Strong sense of „or” = its derivative sense; general question - when a derivative sense should be supposed to exist and when it should not?
(a) history of language (counterexample: „or”)
(b) modified Occam’s Razor: senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity (a near platitude)
- necessity = an additional sense must do some work. If an additional sense is predictable (as in the case of „or”), then it is not an additional sense. So one should suppose a word has a less restrictive rather than a more restrictive meaning, where choice is possible.
(b1) transferred senses.
(b2) derivative senses narrowing down the original sense („or”)
(b1) loose life: derivative sense of „loose”
  unfettened life: no derivative sense of „unfettened.
(b2) - the original sense may become obsolete: *car = wheeled vehicle*
- the narrow sense becomes more important: *disc = gramophone record*
- the relation between: *animal = member of animal kingdom*
  animal = beast

similar to weak/strong „or” but not predictable
(c) intuitions about additional senses
P.49: „In order that a nonconventional implicature should be present, a speaker must utilize the conventional force of the words used. Implicatures depend on the intentions of the speaker, So theorists should be able to differentiate between what is conventional and what is implicated.”
Conventional meaning attached to non-words

(1) Stress:
- Stress has bearing on conventional meaning:
  content versus content
  However, it is not the stress itself that has meaning
- Stress may be changed by the speaker at will (though within limits) contrastive stress: a conventional device for highlighting (?). Special prominence often makes a difference to the speaker’s meaning, helping to generate implicatures. Stress has conventional meaning only if it is unavoidable.

Question: Does contrastive stress have a conventional meaning of its own?
Not necessarily. If we extend the maxim of relevance so that it applies not only to what is said but also to the features of the means used, then we can interpret the meaning of contrastive stress. There are three contexts for its use:

* answers to wh-questions
  a) A. Who painted the house?
     B. Jones did
  b) A. Jones paid the bill
     B. Jones didn’t pay the bill; Smith paid it

Such use of contrastive stress is automatic and it does not lead to any implicatures

* incomplete versions of conversational schema
E.g. No previous utterance:
  A. Jones didn’t pay the bill; Smith did ---- implicature: Someone thinks or might think that Jones did pay the bill (by the maxim of relation)

* contrastive stress on its own
  A. Jones didn’t pay the bill ----- implicature: Someone (other than Jones) paid the bill

More generally: S( ) is contrasted with S( ). Then there is the implicature to the effect that the speaker would deny the substitute version. If is know and is believe:
  A. I knew that ----- implicature: believe is too weak a word for the occasion.

Here P. Grice implicitly introduces the notion of scale (for scalar implicatures)

Side-remark:
  A knows that p if: (1)p; (2) A thinks that p; (3) A has conclusive evidence that p
  Grice weakens (3) and defines know as
  A knows that p if (1) p; (2) A thinks that p; (3) Some conditions placing restrictions on how the speaker came about to think p. (1-3) are non-conventional implicatures of know.

Irony:
Example: A: He is a fine friend
To use a piece of language ironically, one presumes:
  a) familiarity with the practice of using a sentence which would standardly mean that p to convey not-p;
  b) an ironical tone (though its existence is doubtful)
  Additionally:
  c) irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude or evaluation: a hostile or derogatory judgement, indignation, contempt
  d) to be ironical, one must pretend to be serious.
Truth:
P. Strawson’s “speech act” account of truth:
“true” - applies to statements and not utterances
- there cannot be a correlation between statements and facts because statements are facts
- to assert that a proposition is true is to assert that proposition
  p ---- p is true
- It is true that p ------- endorsing, confirming the truth of p

P. Grice’s objections:
- „true” in asserted contexts: If it’s true that...
- „true” of unspecified propositions: The policeman’s statement was true.
P. 56: „My sympathies lie with theories of the correspondence family.”
   It is utterances that are true or rather „factually satisfactory”

P. Grice’s view of communication and meaning

I. P. Grice on meaning
1) natural versus non-natural meaning
2) what is said
   what is conventionally implicated
   what is non-conventionally implicated (with special stress on what is conversationally implicated)
3) speaker’s meaning versus language meaning

II. P. Grice on communication
1) Assumption: people are rational and cooperative
2) The Principle of Communication: the CP and its maxims
3) Communication proceeds differently depending on whether we:
   - observe the CP and the maxims
   - flout the maxims
   - violate the maxims
   - opt out

III. P. Grice on inferences (speaker’s meaning)
1) conventional implicature
2) generalized conversational implicature
3) particularized conversational implicature


1. Introduction

Human communication – expression and recognition of intentions (inferential model of communication versus code model)
Inferential pragmatics – how H infers S’s meaning on the basis of the evidence provided.
Assumption: utterances create expectations which guide H – expectation of relevance.
2. Relevance and cognition

What may be relevant? Any external stimulus or internal representation which provides an input to cognitive processes. The search for relevance is a basic feature of human cognition. When is an input relevant? When it connects with background information to yield relevant conclusions = positive cognitive effects (e.g. contextual implications, strengthening, weakening, withdrawing assumptions).

Relevance of an input to an individual

- Other things being equal, the greater the positive cognitive effects activated by processing the input, the greater the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.
- Other things being equal, the greater the processing effort expended, the lower the relevance of the input to the individual at that time.

Example: 1. We are serving meat
   2. We are serving chicken
   3. Either we are serving chicken or (7x134 – 3) is not 46

Effort and effect are non-representational (non-numerical) dimensions of mental processes. The same is true of relevance. Our perceptual mechanisms tend automatically to activate potentially relevant assumptions and process them in the most productive way.

Cognitive Principle of Relevance
(Wilson & Sperber 2003: 7): Human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance.

3. Relevance and communication

Ostensive-inferential communication

- the informative intention: The intention to inform an audience of something
- The communicative intention: The intention to inform the audience of one’s informative intention.

Ostensive stimulus= behavior designed to attract an audience’s attention and focus it on the communicator’s meaning. It creates a presumption of relevance.

Communicative Principle of Relevance
(Wilson & Sperber 2003: 9): Every ostensive stimulus conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance.

Optimal Relevance
(Wilson & Sperber 2003: 10): An ostensive stimulus is optimally relevant to an audience iff:
(a) It is relevant enough to be worth the audience’s processing effort; (b) It is the most relevant one compatible with communicator’s abilities and preferences.

This definition accounts for situations when S is unable or unwilling to produce the most relevant stimulus (e.g. various types of silence).
H should take the linguistically encoded sentence meaning, following a path of least effort, he should enrich it at the explicit level and complement it at the implicit level until the resulting interpretation meets the expectation of relevance.
Relevance-theoretic Comprehension Procedure
(Wilson & Sperber 2003: 13): (a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguation, reference resolution, implicatures etc.) in order of accessibility. (b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.

When H following the path of least effort arrived at an interpretation that satisfies his expectations of relevance, in the absence of contrary evidence, this is the most plausible hypothesis about S’s meaning. Since comprehension is a non-demonstrable inference process, this hypothesis may well be false, but it is the best a rational hearer can do.

4. Relevance and comprehension

In ostensive-inferential communication, the communicator’s behavior provides no direct evidence for the intended conclusions, and it is only the presumption of relevance conveyed by the ostensive stimulus which encourages the audience to devote the effort to discovering S’s meaning.

In verbal communication, utterances encode logical forms (fragmentary, incomplete conceptual representations) which S has chosen to provide an input to H’s inferential comprehension process. As a result, verbal communication can achieve a degree of explicitness not available in non-verbal communication. Relevance theory treats the identification of explicit content as equally inferential and guided by the Communicative Principle of relevance as the recovery of implicatures. In both cases, H’s goal is to construct a hypothesis about S’s meaning, which satisfies the presumption of relevance conveyed by the utterance. The task may be broken into sub-tasks:

Sub-tasks in the overall comprehension process
(Wilson & Sperber 2003: 16): (a) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about explicit content […] explicature via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes. (b) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual assumptions […] implicated premises. (c) Constructing an appropriate hypothesis about the intended contextual implications […] implicated conclusions.

Comprehension is an on-line process. Each sub-task above involves a non-demonstrable inference process embedded within the overall process of constructing a hypothesis about S’s meaning.

Example: Peter: Did John pay back the money he owed you?
Mary: No. He forgot to go to the bank.

The comprehension process involves a range of lexical-pragmatic processes: 1. narrowing & loosening of concepts (bank1, bank*, bank**); 2. ad hoc concept construction. Lexical items give access not to ready-made prototypes but to a vast array of encyclopedic information which varies in accessibility from occasion to occasion, with different subsets being selected ad hoc to determine the occasion-specific interpretation of a word.

Side remark: loose uses of language – square mind, silent room – different from lies, jokes, metaphors and other tropes. Not felt to be any violations of truthfulness.

Relevance: whether an utterance is literally, loosely or metaphorically understood depends on the mutual adjustment of content, context and cognitive effects in the effort to satisfy H’s expectation of relevance.
Example: Peter: What do you think of Martin’s latest novel?
Mary: It puts me to sleep.
Mary’s answer may be a literal assertion, a hyperbole, a metaphor. Loose interpretation of ‘put to sleep’ = being extremely boring and un-engaging. (cf. square, square face, square mind)
The relative indeterminacy of explicatures is linked to the relative strength of implicatures. A proposition may be more or less strongly implicated by an utterance: strongly (strong implicatures) – if its recovery is essential to get a relevant interpretation; weakly (weak implicatures) – otherwise.
Loose, metaphorical uses, poetic effects – an array of weak implicatures (e.g. ‘John has a square* mind’).

Relevance-theoretic account of irony
- interpretive use of language (e.g. reported speech or thought)
- echoic interpretive use of language – expressing S’s attitude to views tacitly attributed to someone else. Example: Peter: That was a fantastic part! Mary: Fantastic (happily, puzzled, scornfully)

Higher-order speech acts or prepositional attitudes are expressed. Irony – tacitly dissociative attitude to an attributed utterance or thought (Example: ‘He forgot to go to the bank’).

Second-order meta-representational ability is involved in irony. Metaphors and tropes require only first-order. Higher-order explicatures provide an account of speech acts:
Peter: Will you pay back the money by Tuesday?
[Peter is asking Mary whether she will pay back the money by Tuesday]
Mary: I’ll pay it back by then.
[Mary is promising to pay back the money by Tuesday]

5. Relevance theory and mental architecture

Comprehension = a variety of mind-reading or theory of mind (the ability to attribute mental states to others in order to explain and predict their behavior), involving the application of general purpose reasoning mechanisms to premises based on explicit hypothesis about the relations between mental states and behavior.
-Central vs peripheral processes: modular input processes vs central processes (Fodor 83)
- Towards massive modularity --- relevance-theoretic comprehension procedure as a special purpose inferential comprehension module (special purpose inferential procedures - ‘fast and frugal heuristics’; Eye Direction Detector, Intentionality Detector). Communicative Principle of Relevance --- regularity specific to the communicative domain. Such interpretation would allow for distinguishing three ways of approaching utterances: Naïve Optimism, Cautious Optimism, Sophisticated Understanding.

6. Conclusion: an experimentally testable cognitive theory
Examples of MA theses topics:

1. Persuasive language in the world of internet advertising. A study of selected examples.

2. Pictorial and verbal metaphors in advertising. A study of selected examples.

3. Figurative language in Jeremy Clarkson’s car reviews: a comparison of selected examples from *Top Gear* and the *Sunday Times* motoring column.

4. Taboo in advertising. A study of selected TV commercials.

5. Irony in *House, M.D.* A study of selected examples.


7. Cultural differences in body language. A study of selected examples of hand gestures.

8. Subtitling or voice over? A case study of *How I Met Your Mother* translations into Polish.


2. Grice, P. 1975. „Logic and conversation”.
3. Grice, P. 1978. „Further notes on logic and conversation”.