Overview of topics
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2020
Jan 7

1 Kinds of meaning

For any given utterance, we can ask

• What does it claim, ask, demand, …?

• What does it presuppose?

• What does it suggest or imply?

• What are its connotations?

2 Entailment

(1) a. Sandy danced.
   b. Sandy waltzed.

(2) a. A student danced.
   b. A Swedish student danced.
   c. A student waltzed.

(3) a. No student danced.
   b. No Swedish student danced.
   c. No student waltzed.

(4) a. Sandy didn’t dance.
   b. Sandy didn’t waltz.

(5) a. Every student danced.
   b. Every Swedish student danced.
   c. Every student waltzed.
   d. At least one student waltzed.

(6) a. Most students danced.
   b. Most Swedish students danced.
   c. Most students waltzed.

Try with few, not every, only, a minority of, and exactly three.
3 Modifiers

(7) a(n) \(\{\) Norwegian near-sighted alleged former fake porcelain \(\} \) spy (which of these, if any, entail spy?)

(8) ![Dog](image)

(9) a. banana cake  
    b. skillet cake  
    c. birthday cake

(10) a. real time-machine \((W/\ Bob\ &\ Dave)\)  
    b. real-time machine

4 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of the ways we enrich the conventionalized meanings of the things we say and hear into their fuller intended meanings. This enrichment is complex, but it is also systematic — and pervasive. The philosopher and linguist Paul Grice (left) was the first to push for a theory of pragmatics. We’ll look closely at a variety of pragmatic phenomena, using Grice’s theories as a starting point.


[Language, of course, cannot be interpreted apart from context. The meaning of a word that appears ambiguous if viewed in isolation may become clear when the word is analyzed in light of the terms that surround it.]

(11) ![Books](image)

(12) ![Twitter](image)  

“These two books contain the sum total of all human knowledge” (@James_Kpatrick)

h/t Julia Gong
(13)  a.  From Solan and Tiersma's *Speaking of Crime*, p. 213:
The defendant, Samuel Bronston, was president of Samuel Bronston Productions, Inc., a movie production company. He had personal as well as company bank accounts in various European countries. His company petitioned for bankruptcy. At the bankruptcy hearing, the following exchange occurred between the lawyer for the creditor and Bronston [who was under oath —CP]:

   Q  Do you have any bank accounts in Swiss banks, Mr. Bronston?
   A  No, sir.
   Q  Have you ever?
   A  The company had a bank account there for about six months, in Zurich.

The facts: Bronston earlier had a large personal bank account in Switzerland for five years, where he had deposited and drawn checks totalling more than $180,000.

b.  Solan and Tiersma summarize the legal definition of perjury (p. 212–213):
Perjury consists of lying under oath: having sworn to tell the truth, the witness speaks falsely. [...] Federal law also requires that the person “willfully and contrary to such oath states or subscribes any material matter which he does not believe to be true.” This is often called the “false statement” requirement. Perjury involves asserting or declaring that a particular state of affairs exists (or existed in the past), when the speaker knows that not to be the case. If the speaker did not know that the actual and asserted state of affairs were different, she would have made a mere mistake. Not only must the accused make a false statement, but it must be material. If the false statement relates to a minor matter or something that is unlikely to influence a trial or other official proceeding, it does not constitute perjury, even though we might still call the statement a lie.

5  Presuppositions

(14)  Who wants to go swimming? We do, too.  
(NY Times editorial page, 2007-03-31)

(15)  Confirm your eBay transaction  
[spam email]

(16)  There is no God and Dawkins is his prophet.

(17)  From the movie High Fidelity:
   “There’s something different about the sound of her voice ... And what did she mean last night, she hasn’t slept with him yet. Yet. What does *yet* mean, anyway? ‘I haven’t seen... Evil Dead II yet.’ What does that mean? It means you’re going to go, doesn’t it?”

(18)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RE: OLIVE GARDEN</th>
<th>Olive Garden has spent years building its reputation as a family-friendly restaurant that is safe for all patrons to dine in. Our client has learned that you have engaged in spreading false, destructive, and defamatory rumors about it.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Today at 4:01 PM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEASE AND DESIST</td>
<td>You are hereby directed to delete your tweet with the phrase “respect to @olivegarden for no longer selling AR-15s at all their locations”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To the owner of the “Seinfeld Current Day” Twitter account (@Seinfeld2000),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 Speech-acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Force</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declarative</td>
<td>Turtles are amazing.</td>
<td>assertion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I wonder where Kim is.</td>
<td>question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You should move your bicycle.</td>
<td>suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You can have a cookie.</td>
<td>invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrogative</td>
<td>What day is today?</td>
<td>question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What on earth are you doing?</td>
<td>accusation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you want to have ice-cream?</td>
<td>invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Could you help me?</td>
<td>request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperative</td>
<td>Move your bicycle!</td>
<td>command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have a cookie.</td>
<td>invitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please rain!</td>
<td>plea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get well soon!</td>
<td>well-wish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(19) [Context: A police officer has stopped a driver for speeding.]

Driver: Is there any way that we can sort this out here, officer?

(20) Which actually invokes the speaker’s right to counsel, in the technical legal sense?

a. I hereby request to speak with a lawyer.
b. Can I speak with a lawyer?
c. Maybe I should talk with a lawyer.
d. Will I see a lawyer at some point?

7 Framing

(21) Democratic party vs. Democrat party

(22) (23) hunger relief

(24) tax relief

(25) Obamacare

(26) green space

8 Swearing

What are swears, and how do they work, semantically, pragmatically, socially, legally, …? Why do they have so much power? What is the nature of the taboos that surround them?