Pragmatic enrichment: Introduction by example
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2015
Feb 3

1 Background

Pragmatics is the study of the ways we enrich the conventionalized meanings of the things we say and hear into their fuller intended meanings. In class, we’ll focus on the principles that govern this enrichment process, with special emphasis on the extent to which it is systematic and universal.

Levinson’s analogy (Presumptive Meanings, p. 2–4):

2 Group task

Work through the examples in section 5. Each one is accompanied by some questions. Answer those as a group. There’s no rush to get through them. You can pick which ones you want to start with.

3 Goals

• Get better acquainted with pragmatic data.
• Begin thinking about pragmatic enrichment.
• See if we can develop generalizations that get at our implicit knowledge of pragmatics.

4 Final products

• Each group turns in a completed worksheet with all the group member’s names at the top.
• We will go around the room to hear about what the groups discovered. So you should think about what your group will present, and you might designate a spokesperson.
5 Examples

(1) Two friends are having a culinary adventure:

A: Have you made fondue in this pot yet?
B: Not chocolate fondue.

i. Does B’s answer entail that B has made fondue in the pot?

ii. Do you regard B’s answer as cooperative?

(2) John and Mary have recently started going together. Valentino is Mary’s ex-boyfriend. One evening, John asks Mary, “Have you seen Valentino this week?” Mary answers, “Valentino’s been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks.” Valentino has in fact been sick with mononucleosis for the past two weeks, but it is also the case that Mary had a date with Valentino the night before. (From Speaking of Crime.)

i. What is your guess about what Mary intended to communicate with her answer?

ii. Did Mary lie?
A and B are talking about their mutual friend Jones. That’s all we know about the context.

A: Does Jones have a new girlfriend?
B: He’s been spending a lot of time in New York.

i. What is your guess about what Speaker B intended to communicate with his answer?

ii. What might have stopped Speaker B from just replying “Yes” or “No”?

Speakers A and B have the following little conversation:

A: I lost a twenty dollar bill — do you know where it is?
B: I saw it on the floor somewhere.

Speaker A later discovers that B picked up A’s $20 from the floor and spent the whole of it on gumballs.  

(From Speaking of Crime.)

i. What is your guess about what Speaker B intended to communicate with her answer?

ii. Did Speaker B lie?
From the detective show *Monk* (approximate from ‘Mr. Monk goes to the Carnival’). The subject is whether Mr. Monk, who earlier had a nervous breakdown, is ready to be put back on the police force. Stottlemeyer is Monk’s friend and former captain.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commission member</th>
<th>Is Mr. Monk ready to be put back on the force?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stottlemeyer</td>
<td>Mr. Monk has <em>excellent</em> instincts.</td>
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Commission member  Yes, but is he ready to be reinstated?
Stottlemeyer  He is an *excellent* investigator.
Commission member  Captain, please…

i. What is Stottlemeyer’s strategy here? How is he hoping to be understood?

At a May 2004 Senate hearing, this exchange took place:

**Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)** General Sanchez, today’s USA Today, sir, reported that you ordered or approved the use of sleep deprivation, intimidation by guard dogs, excessive noise and inducing fear as an interrogation method for a prisoner in Abu Ghraib prison. Is that correct?

**General Sanchez** Sir, that may be correct that it’s in a news article, but I never approved any of those measures to be used within CJTF-7 at any time in the last year.

i. Note the final *within* clause of Sanchez’s reply. What does it contribute to the overall message he ends up sending?

ii. What’s a good, or likely, follow-up question for Senator Reed to ask?