Pragmatic enrichment: Introduction by example
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2020
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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.

2 Goals for this handout

• 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.

3 Examples

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 (in our semantic sense) that B has made fondue in the pot?

ii. Do you regard B’s answer as cooperative?
Bart and Lisa Simpson have both taken the same test at school. It is well-known that Lisa does better in school than Bart.

Marge: Did Lisa pass the test?
Teacher: Well, BART passed. You do the math!

i. What is your guess about what the teacher intended to communicate?

ii. What facts about the context and the utterance conspire to communicate this?

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?
The detective show Monk, ‘Mr. Monk goes to the Carnival’

Context: 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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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stottlemeyer</td>
<td>Mr. Monk has excellent instincts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission member</td>
<td>Yes, but is he ready to be reinstated?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stottlemeyer</td>
<td>He is an excellent investigator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commission member</td>
<td>Captain, please…</td>
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1. What is Stottlemeyer’s strategy here? How is he hoping to be understood?

2. Do you regard Stottlemeyer’s as cooperative here?

Source: May 2004 Senate hearing

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.

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

2. What’s a good, or likely, follow-up question for Senator Reed to ask?
During the 2000 presidential race (before U.S. politicians were more or less free to admit to past marijuana use), the Dallas Morning News asked candidate George Bush how he would answer the questions about drug use on the application for getting a high-level government security clearance. Bush replied, “As I understand it, the current form asks the question, ‘Did somebody use drugs within the last seven years?’; and I will be glad to answer that question, and the answer is ‘No’.”

i. What does this answer suggest about Bush’s history of drug use?

ii. What’s a good, or likely, follow-up question?

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. Speaking of Crime

i. What did the lawyer likely infer from Bronston’s answer?

ii. What did Bronston intend to communicate with his answer? How can we be sure?