Overview of topics
Chris Potts, Ling 130a/230a: Introduction to semantics and pragmatics, Winter 2016
Jan 5

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 Quantification

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

(9) Sam proofread the document, and he didn’t see a misprint.

(10) Supreme Court: Small v. United States (April 26, 2005)

More: http://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=3248

a. Background: 18 U. S. C. §922(g)(1) forbids “any person […] convicted in any court […] of a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year […] to […] possess […] any firearm.”

b. Background: “Petitioner Small was convicted in a Japanese Court of trying to smuggle firearms and ammunition into that country. He served five years in prison and then returned to the United States, where he bought a gun” and was subsequently arrested.

c. Small’s argument: any court ranges only over U. S. courts.

d. Majority opinion: The meaning of any is context dependent. For example, “any person may or may not mean to include persons outside the jurisdiction of the state.” and “In ordinary life, a speaker who says, I’ll see any film, may or may not mean to include films shown in another city.”

e. Dissenting opinion (Thomas, Scalia, Kennedy): The decision “institutes the troubling rule that any does not really mean any, but may mean ‘some subset of any’”.

4 Modifiers

(11) a(n) { Norwegian near-sighted alleged former fake porcelain } spy (which of these character is a spy right now?)

(12) real-time machine vs. real time-machine (W/ Bob & Dave, episode 1)
5 Polarity sensitivity

(13) a. Sam hasn’t ever taken notes.
    b. *Sam has ever taken notes.

(14) a. At no time has Sam ever taken notes.
    b. *At some times, Sam has ever taken notes.

(15) a. Sam took the class without ever taking notes.
    b. *Sam took the class while ever taking notes.

(16) a. No student has ever taken notes.
    b. No student who ever studied semantics took notes.

(17) a. *A student has ever taken notes.
    b. *A student who ever studied semantics took notes.

(18) a. Every student who ever studied semantics took notes.
    b. *Every student has ever taken notes.

6 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.

(19) Honest or dishonest? The following contexts differ only in the price of movie tickets:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context 1</th>
<th>Context 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kyle and Ellen would like to see a movie.</td>
<td>Kyle and Ellen would like to see a movie.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyle has $20 in his pocket. Tickets cost $8</td>
<td>Kyle has $20 in his pocket. Tickets cost $10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each.</td>
<td>each.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kyle: “I have $8.”
7 Presuppositions

(20) Who wants to go swimming? We do, too. (NY Times editorial page, 2007-03-31)
(21) Are you still looking for a job? [spam email]
(22) Confirm your eBay transaction [spam email]
(23) There is no God and Dawkins is his prophet.
(24) From the movie High Fidelity:
ROB (V.O.)
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?

8 Speech-acts

(25) [Context: A police officer has stopped a driver for speeding.]
Driver: Is there any way that we can sort this out here, officer?
(26) Mobster to witness: If you tell anyone, there will be consequences.
(27) 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?

9 Framing

(28) Democratic party vs. Democrat party
(29) hunger relief
(30) tax relief
(31) Obamacare
(32) green space