

PRAGMATICS

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Notation Conventions

- p epistemic possibility for speaker; thus $Pp = p$ is compatible with all that the speaker knows
- $\Box$ necessary; e.g. $\Box p =$ it is necessary that p
- $\Diamond$ possible; e.g. $\Diamond p =$ it is possible that p
- λ lambda-operator (Chapter 4)
- γ gamma-operator (Chapter 4)

I

The scope of pragmatics

The purpose of this Chapter is to provide some indication of the scope of linguistic pragmatics. First, the historical origin of the term **pragmatics** will be briefly summarized, in order to indicate some usages of the term that are divergent from the usage in this book. Secondly, we will review some definitions of the field, which, while being less than fully satisfactory, will at least serve to indicate the rough scope of linguistic pragmatics. Thirdly, some reasons for the current interest in the field will be explained, while a final section illustrates some basic kinds of pragmatic phenomena. In passing, some analytical notions that are useful background will be introduced.

1.1 The origin and historical vagaries of the term pragmatics

The modern usage of the term **pragmatics** is attributable to the philosopher Charles Morris (1938), who was concerned to outline (after Locke and Peirce)¹ the general shape of a science of signs, or **semiotics** (or **semiotic** as Morris preferred). Within semiotics, Morris distinguished three distinct branches of inquiry: **syntactics** (or **syntax**), being the study of "the formal relations of signs to one another", **semantics**, the study of "the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable" (their designata), and **pragmatics**, the study of "the relation of signs to interpreters" (1938: 6). Within each branch of semiotics, one could make the distinction between **pure** studies, concerned with the

¹ Apart from this connection, there is only the slightest historical relation between pragmatics and the philosophical doctrines of **pragmatism** (see Morris, 1938 (1971: 43); Lyons, 1977a: 119). There have been recent attempts, however, to recast Morris's trichotomy in a Peircean (or pragmatist) mould, which are not covered in this book: see Silverstein, 1976; Bean, 1978.

elaboration of the relevant metalanguage, and **descriptive** studies which applied the metalanguage to the description of specific signs and their usages (1938 (1971: 24)).

As instances of usage governed by **pragmatical rule**, Morris noted that "interjections such as *Oh!*, commands such as *Come here!*, ... expressions such as *Good morning!* and various rhetorical and poetical devices, occur only under certain definite conditions in the users of the language" (1938 (1971: 48)). Such matters would still today be given a treatment within linguistic pragmatics. But Morris went on to expand the scope of pragmatics in accord with his particular behaviouristic theory of semiotics (Black, 1947): "It is a sufficiently accurate characterization of pragmatics to say that it deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs" (1938: 108). Such a scope is very much wider than the work that currently goes on under the rubric of linguistic pragmatics, for it would include what is now known as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, neurolinguistics and much besides.

Since Morris's introduction of the trichotomy syntax, semantics and pragmatics, the latter term has come to be used in two very distinct ways. On the one hand, the very broad use intended by Morris has been retained, and this explains the usage of the term *pragmatics* in the titles of books that deal, for example, with matters as diverse as the psychopathology of communication (in the manner of G. Bateson and R. D. Laing – see Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967) and the evolution of symbol systems (see Cherry, 1974). Even here though, there has been a tendency to use *pragmatics* exclusively as a division of *linguistic* semiotics, rather than as pertaining to sign systems in general. This broad usage of the term, covering sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and more, is still the one generally used on the Continent (see e.g. the collection in Wunderlich, 1972, and issues of the *Journal of Pragmatics*).

On the other hand, and especially within analytical philosophy, the term *pragmatics* was subject to a successive narrowing of scope. Here the philosopher and logician Carnap was particularly influential. After an initial Morrisian usage (Carnap, 1938: 2), he adopted the following version of the trichotomy:

If in an investigation explicit reference is made to the speaker, or to put it in more general terms, to the user of the language,

then we assign it [the investigation] to the field of pragmatics ... If we abstract from the user of the language and analyze only the expressions and their designata, we are in the field of semantics. And, finally, if we abstract from the designata also and analyze only the relations between the expressions, we are in (logical) syntax.

Unfortunately Carnap's usage of the term *pragmatics* was confused by his adoption of Morris's further distinction between pure and descriptive studies, and he came to equate pragmatics with descriptive semiotics in general, and thus with the study of natural (as opposed to logical) languages (Carnap, 1959: 13; see the useful clarification in Lieb, 1971). But Carnap was not even consistent here: he also held (Carnap, 1956) that there was room for a **pure pragmatics** which would be concerned with concepts like *belief*, *utterance*, and *intention* and their logical inter-relation. This latter usage, now more or less defunct, explains the use of the term in, for example, the title of a book by Martin (1959). Thus at least four quite different senses of the term can be found in Carnap's works, but it was the definition quoted above that was finally influential.

Incidentally, already in Morris's and Carnap's usages there can be found a systematic three-way ambiguity: the term *pragmatics* was applied not only to branches of inquiry (as in the contrast between pragmatics and semantics), but also to features of the object language (or language under investigation), so that one could talk of, say, the pragmatic particle *Oh!* in English, and to features of the metalanguage (or technical description), so that one could talk of, say, a pragmatic, versus a semantic, description of the particle *Oh!*. Such an ambiguity merely seems to parallel the way in which the sister terms *semantics* and *syntax* are used, and to introduce little confusion (but cf. Sayward, 1974).

The idea that pragmatics was the study of aspects of language that required reference to the users of the language then led to a very natural, further restriction of the term in analytical philosophy. For there is one aspect of natural languages that indubitably requires such reference, namely the study of **deictic** or **indexical** words like the pronouns *I* and *you* (see Chapter 2). The philosophical, and especially logical, interest in these terms is simply that they account for the potential failure of generally valid schemes of reasoning. For example, "I am Greta Garbo, Greta Garbo is a woman, therefore I am a

woman", is only necessarily true if in addition to the first two premises being true, the speaker of the conclusion is the same speaker as the speaker of the first premise. Bar-Hillel (1954) therefore took the view that pragmatics is the study of languages, both natural and artificial, that contain indexical or deictic terms, and this usage was explicitly adopted by Kalish (1967), and most influentially by Montague (1968). Such a usage has little to offer linguists, since all natural languages have deictic terms, and it would follow, as Gazdar (1979a: 2) points out, that natural languages would have no semantics but only a syntax and a pragmatics. If the trichotomy is to do some work within linguistics, some less restricted scope for pragmatics must be found.

In fact, in the late 1960s, an implicit version of Carnap's definition – investigations requiring reference to the users of a language – was adopted within linguistics, and specifically within the movement known as **generative semantics**. The history of that movement awaits a historian of ideas (but see Newmeyer, 1980), but its association with pragmatics can be explained by the resurgence of the interest in meaning which the movement represented. Such an interest inevitably involves pragmatics, as we shall see. Moreover this interest in meaning in a wide sense proved to be one of the best directions from which generative semantics could assail Chomsky's (1965) **standard theory**. At the same time, there was a keen interest shown by linguists in philosophers' attempts to grapple with problems of meaning, sometimes from the point of view of the 'users of the language'. For a period, at least, linguists and philosophers seemed to be on a common path, and this commonality of interest crystallized many of the issues with which this book is concerned. During this period, the scope of pragmatics was implicitly restricted. Carnap's 'investigations making reference to users of the language' is at once too narrow and too broad for linguistic interests. It is too broad because it admits studies as non-linguistic as Freud's investigations of 'slips of the tongue' or Jung's studies of word associations. So studies in linguistic pragmatics need to be restricted to investigations that have at least potential linguistic implications. On the other hand, Carnap's definition is too narrow in that, on a simple interpretation, it excludes parallel phenomena.² For example, just as the

² On another interpretation, all pragmatic parameters refer to users of the language, if only because such parameters must, in order to be relevant, be known or believed by participants.

interpretation of the words *I* and *you* relies on the identification of particular participants (or 'users') and their role in the speech event, so the words *here* and *now* rely for their interpretation on the place and time of the speech event. Therefore Carnap's definition might be amended to something like: 'those linguistic investigations that make necessary reference to aspects of the context', where the term **context** is understood to cover the identities of participants, the temporal and spatial parameters of the speech event, and (as we shall see) the beliefs, knowledge and intentions of the participants in that speech event, and no doubt much besides.

To summarize, a number of distinct usages of the term *pragmatics* have sprung from Morris's original division of semiotics: the study of the huge range of psychological and sociological phenomena involved in sign systems in general or in language in particular (the Continental sense of the term); or the study of certain abstract concepts that make reference to agents (one of Carnap's senses); or the study of indexicals or deictic terms (Montague's sense); or finally the recent usage within Anglo-American linguistics and philosophy. This book is concerned exclusively with the last sense of the term, and it is to an explication of this particular usage that we should now turn.

1.2 Defining pragmatics

The relatively restricted sense of the term *pragmatics* in Anglo-American philosophy and linguistics, and correspondingly in this book, deserves some attempt at definition. Such a definition is, however, by no means easy to provide, and we shall play with a number of possibilities each of which will do little more than sketch a range of possible scopes for the field. This diversity of possible definitions and lack of clear boundaries may be disconcerting, but it is by no means unusual: since academic fields are congeries of preferred methods, implicit assumptions, and focal problems or subject matters, attempts to define them are rarely wholly satisfactory. And indeed, in one sense there is no problem of definition at all: just as, traditionally, syntax is taken to be the study of the combinatorial properties of words and their parts, and semantics to be the study of meaning, so pragmatics is the study of language usage. Such a definition is just as good (and bad) as the parallel definitions of the sister terms, but it will hardly suffice to indicate what the practitioners

of pragmatics actually do; to find that out, as in any discipline, one must go and take a look.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for attempting at least some indication of the scope of pragmatics. In the first place, it is simply a sufficiently unfamiliar term. In the second place, it is not so easy to just 'go and take a look' at what workers in pragmatics do: there are (at the time of writing) no available textbooks, only one specialist journal (*Journal of Pragmatics*) and that covering the broader Continental usage of the term, only a handful of monographs and a few collections of papers. Nevertheless, there is much work scattered throughout the various journals of linguistics and philosophy. Thirdly, some authors seem to suggest that there is no coherent field at all; thus Lyons (1977a: 117) states that "the applicability [of the distinction between syntax, semantics and pragmatics] to the description of natural languages, in contrast to the description or construction of logical calculi, is, to say the least, uncertain", while Searle, Kiefer & Bierwisch (1980: viii) suggest that "*Pragmatics* is one of those words (*societal* and *cognitive* are others) that give the impression that something quite specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning." The pragmaticist is thus challenged to show that, at least within the linguistic and philosophical tradition that is the concern of this book, the term does have clear application.

Let us therefore consider a set of possible definitions of pragmatics. We shall find that each of them has deficiencies or difficulties of a sort that would equally hinder definitions of other fields, but at least in this way, by assaults from all flanks, a good sketch of the general topography can be obtained.

Let us start with some definitions that are in fact less than satisfactory. One possible definition might go as follows: pragmatics is the study of those principles that will account for why a certain set of sentences are anomalous, or not possible utterances. That set might include:³

- (1) ??Come there please!
- (2) ??Aristotle was Greek, but I don't believe it
- (3) ??Fred's children are hippies, and he has no children
- (4) ??Fred's children are hippies, and he has children
- (5) ??I order you not to obey this order
- (6) ??I hereby sing
- (7) ??As everyone knows, the earth please revolves around the sun

The explanation of the anomalies exhibited by these sentences might be provided by pointing out that there are no, or at least no ordinary, contexts in which they could be appropriately used.⁴ Although an approach of this sort may be quite a good way of illustrating the kind of principles that pragmatics is concerned with, it will hardly do as an explicit definition of the field – for the simple reason that the set of pragmatic (as opposed to semantic, syntactic or sociolinguistic) anomalies are presupposed, rather than explained.⁵

Another kind of definition that might be offered would be that pragmatics is the study of language from a **functional** perspective, that is, that it attempts to explain facets of linguistic structure by reference to non-linguistic pressures and causes. But such a definition, or scope, for pragmatics would fail to distinguish linguistic pragmatics from many other disciplines interested in functional approaches to language, including psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Moreover, it may be plausibly argued that to adopt a definition of this sort is to confuse the *motives* for studying pragmatics, with the *goals* or general shape of a theory (about which more later).

One quite restricted scope for pragmatics that has been proposed is that pragmatics should be concerned solely with principles of language usage, and have nothing to do with the description of linguistic structure. Or, to invoke Chomsky's distinction between **competence** and **performance**, pragmatics is concerned solely with performance principles of language use. Thus, Katz & Fodor (1963) suggested that a theory of pragmatics (or a theory of **setting**

⁴ This line of argument relies on the distinction between **use** and **mention**, or between 'ordinary' usage and metalinguistic usage, for which see Lyons, 1977a: 5ff and references therein. In the sense of this distinction, sentences like (1)–(7) can be mentioned, but they cannot easily be used.

⁵ Another problem is that it is often in fact possible to imagine contexts in which the alleged anomalies are after all quite usable – the reader can try with the examples above. This problem will recur when we consider the concept of appropriateness of an utterance, discussed below.

³ We shall use the symbol ?? at the beginning of example sentences to indicate that they are (at least putatively) pragmatically anomalous, reserving * for sentences that are syntactically ill-formed or semantically anomalous; a single initial ? indicates anomaly on at least one of these three levels, but is non-committal about the nature of the anomaly.

selection as they then called it) would essentially be concerned with the disambiguation of sentences by the contexts in which they were uttered. In fact it is clear that contexts do a lot more than merely select between available semantic readings of sentences – for example, irony, understatement and the like are kinds of use that actually create new interpretations in contexts. Still, one could claim that grammar (in the broad sense inclusive of phonology, syntax and semantics) is concerned with the context-free assignment of meaning to linguistic forms, while pragmatics is concerned with the further interpretation of those forms in a context:

[Grammars] are theories about the structure of sentence types ... Pragmatic theories, in contrast, do nothing to explicate the structure of linguistic constructions or grammatical properties and relations ... They explicate the reasoning of speakers and hearers in working out the correlation in a context of a sentence token with a proposition. In this respect, a pragmatic theory is part of performance. (Katz, 1977: 19)

This position has a number of adherents (Kempson, 1975, 1977; Smith & Wilson, 1979), but it has a serious difficulty. The problem is that aspects of linguistic structure sometimes directly encode (or otherwise interact with) features of the context. It then becomes impossible to draw a neat boundary between context-independent grammar (competence) and context-dependent interpretation (performance). This problem is unwittingly illustrated by Katz's explication of this boundary: he points out that the pairs *rabbit* and *bunny*, or *dog* and *doggie* differ in that the second member of each pair is appropriately used either by or to children. Since the distinction is one relating to the appropriate users of the terms in a context, the distinction would not be part of a linguistic description of English, which would merely note that the members of each pair are synonymous. However, it is clear that the distinction is built into the language, in just the same way that in many languages degrees of respect between participants are encoded in lexis and morphology. Katz suggests that in order to ascertain whether a linguistic feature is context-dependent or context-independent, we imagine the feature occurring on an anonymous postcard (as an approximation to the empty or **null context**).⁶ But if we apply this criterion we see that

⁶ Here contrast Searle (1979b: 117): "There is no such thing as the zero or null context for the interpretation of sentences ... we understand the meaning

the implication or inference that speaker or addressee is a child is as available when *bunny* is written on an anonymous postcard as it is when said in some concrete appropriate context (Gazdar, 1979a: 3). And that of course is because the kind of appropriate speaker or addressee is encoded by the term *bunny*.

Here we come to the heart of the definitional problem: the term *pragmatics* covers both context-dependent aspects of language structure and principles of language usage and understanding that have nothing or little to do with linguistic structure. It is difficult to forge a definition that will happily cover both aspects. But this should not be taken to imply that pragmatics is a hodge-podge, concerned with quite disparate and unrelated aspects of language; rather, pragmaticists are specifically interested in the inter-relation of language structure and principles of language usage. Let us now consider some potential definitions that are more plausible candidates.

We may begin with a definition that is specifically aimed at capturing the concern of pragmatics with features of language structure. The definition might go as follows:

- (8) Pragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are **grammaticalized**, or encoded in the structure of a language⁷

Or, putting it another way, one could say that pragmatics is the study of just those aspects of the relationship between language and context that are relevant to the writing of grammars. Such a definition restricts pragmatics to the study of certain aspects of linguistic structure, and stands in strong contrast to Katz's proposal, outlined above, that would restrict pragmatics to the study of grammatically irrelevant aspects of language usage. Such a scope for pragmatics would include the study of **deixis**, including honorifics and the like, and probably the study of **presupposition** and **speech acts**, i.e. much of the present book. It would exclude the study of principles of language usage that could not be shown to have repercussions on the grammar of languages, and this could be an embarrassment,

of such sentences only against a set of background assumptions about the contexts in which the sentence could be appropriately uttered."

⁷ The term *grammaticalization* is used throughout this book in the broad sense covering the encoding of meaning distinctions – again in a wide sense – in the lexicon, morphology, syntax and phonology of languages.

because, at least at first sight, the extremely important implications called **conversational implicatures** would lie outside the purview of a pragmatic theory. On the other hand, such a scope for pragmatics has the possible advantage that it would effectively delimit the field, and exclude neighbouring fields like sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics – in short it would bound Morris's and Carnap's definitions in a way that guaranteed linguistic relevance.

Now, any definition of pragmatics that excludes one of its presumed focal phenomena, namely conversational implicature, is unlikely to be attractive. Nevertheless, its adherents might appeal to the plausibility of the following general principle: any systematic principle of language usage is ultimately likely to have an impact on language structure. There is perhaps some basis for such an assumption (see e.g. Brown & Levinson, 1978: 260ff). And in fact conversational implicatures, which are inferences that arise on the basis of some general rules or maxims of conversational behaviour, can indeed be shown to have repercussions on linguistic structure (see Chapter 3 below). So the definition may in fact be much less restrictive than it appears at first sight.

Other problems concern the notions of context and grammaticalization that the definition rests on. Arguably, though, it is a strength of this approach that it is not required to give a prior characterization of the notion of context. For, assuming that we have a clear idea of the limits of semantics, then pragmatics studies all the non-semantic features that are encoded in languages, and these features are aspects of the context. What aspects of the gross physical, social and interactional aspects of the situation of utterance are linguistically relevant is thus an empirical question, and we can study the world's languages to find out what they are. Of course, we would need to make an important distinction here between **universal pragmatics**, the general theory of what aspects of context get encoded and how, and the **language-specific pragmatics** of individual languages; for example, the pragmatics of English might have relatively little to say about social status (beyond what we need to describe the appropriate contexts for the use of *sir*, *your honour* and the like), while in contrast the pragmatics of Japanese would be greatly concerned with the grammaticalization of the relative social ranks of participants and referents.

On the other hand, the notion of grammaticalization, or linguistic

encoding, is thorny. To be effective, we need to be able to distinguish mere correlation between linguistic form and context from incorporation of contextual significance into the associated linguistic form. There is little doubt that there are clear cases of the one and the other: for example, the slurred speech associated with drunkenness may be mere correlation, while the association of intimacy or solidarity with the French pronoun *tu* is a grammaticalized feature of context. But there are many borderline cases. To make the distinction, perhaps the following criteria might be suggested: for a feature of the context to be linguistically encoded, (a) it must be intentionally communicated, (b) it must be conventionally associated with the linguistic form in question, (c) the encoding form must be a member of a contrast set, the other members of which encode different features, (d) the linguistic form must be subject to regular grammatical processes. On these grounds one might hope to exclude, say, the association of a particular dialect with a speaker from a particular area – such an association, perhaps, not being normally intentionally conveyed, not being associated with the linguistic features by arbitrary convention but by historical 'accident', and so on. On the other hand, features of 'baby talk', of which the lexical alternate *bunny* is a part, would presumably be considered to be encoded in English, because at least some of them seem to meet these criteria. However, it is unlikely that these criteria are sufficient to distinguish many borderline cases, and the notion would need further explication.⁸

In sum, the main strength of this definition of pragmatics is that it restricts the field to purely linguistic matters. Yet it is probably too restrictive to reflect accurately current usage. The most unfortunate restriction is the exclusion of those principles of language use and interpretation that explain how extra meaning (in a broad sense) is 'read into' utterances without actually being encoded in them. It is a definition, then, that handles the aspect of pragmatics concerned with linguistic structure, but not the side concerned with principles of language usage, or at least only indirectly as they impinge on linguistic organization.

In the definition above, the notion of encoding implies that pragmatics is concerned with certain aspects of meaning. One kind of definition that would make this central might run as follows:

⁸ Consider e.g. the French *Je suis malheureuse*, which encodes that the speaker is female: in what sense would this be *intentionally* communicated?

- (9) Pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory

Or, as Gazdar (1979a: 2) has put it, assuming that semantics is limited to the statement of truth conditions:

Pragmatics has as its topic those aspects of the meaning of utterances which cannot be accounted for by straightforward reference to the truth conditions of the sentences uttered.⁹ Put crudely: PRAGMATICS = MEANING - TRUTH CONDITIONS.

Such a definition is likely, at first, to cause puzzlement. Surely semantics is, by definition, the study of meaning in its entirety, so how can there be any residue to constitute the topic of pragmatics? But here we need to note that the definition of semantics as the study of meaning is just as simplistic as the definition of pragmatics as the study of language usage. First, we need to distinguish between some broad sense of the term *semantics* used in a more or less pre-theoretical way (see e.g. the coverage in Lyons, 1977a),¹⁰ and a technical use of the term to cover a particular, deliberately restricted semantic theory in an overall theory of grammar, or language structure. Semantic theory in the latter sense is going to have a very much narrower scope than the study of meaning in its entirety, as we shall indicate immediately below. Secondly, the intended scope of the term *meaning* in the definition is extremely broad, in a way that will need explication. So the answer to the puzzle is that, from the point of view of an overall integrated linguistic theory, there will be a great deal of the general field of meaning left unaccounted for by a restricted semantic theory, and this could indeed constitute the domain of pragmatics.

One objection to such a definition could be that the scope of pragmatics would seem therefore to vary considerably according to the kind of semantic theory adopted – narrow semantic theories like those based on truth conditions will leave a large residue of ‘meaning’ to be studied in pragmatics; apparently broader semantic theories, like some of those based on components or features of meaning, may leave much less for pragmatics to deal with.¹¹ Certainly it has to be

⁹ The ‘straightforward’ qualification, Gazdar explains, is necessary because pragmatic implications often derive in part from the truth conditions of sentences uttered. See Chapter 3 below.

¹⁰ A usage general in linguistics until the influence of formal semantics, practised by philosophers, was felt in the 1960s.

¹¹ Feature-based semantic theories are not of course *inherently* broader than truth-conditional ones. But feature-based theories are usually associated with

admitted that to some extent the nature of a pragmatic theory must depend crucially on the kind of semantic theory adopted, but that will be true for any definition of pragmatics that seeks an exclusive domain, complementary and non-overlapping with semantics. But it is important to see that this dependency is only partial, for we now know enough about the nature of meaning in the broad sense to make it likely that there are substantial areas that could not be accommodated within any single semantic theory built on homogeneous principles.

This knowledge is based on some substantial advances made in the last ten years or so, namely the discovery that there are at least half a dozen distinct and different kinds of meaning component or implication (or inference) that are involved in the meaning of natural language utterances. The distinctions are based on the fact that each of these kinds of inference behaves in different ways. In particular, they behave differently in **projection**, i.e. in the ways in which they are compounded when a complex sentence, whose parts produce the inferences in question, is built up. Some of these meaning components disappear under specific and distinctive conditions, namely particular linguistic constructions. In addition, some of these meaning components are **defeasible**, i.e. subject to cancellation by features of the context (a notion explained in Chapter 3 below). Such features interact with or arise from assumptions made by participants in the context, and are particularly inappropriate aspects of meaning to incorporate within a semantic theory. The dilemma that these multiple aspects of meaning pose for the semanticist can perhaps best be gauged from Table 1.1. Here we list seven such putative meaning components or inferential relations of an utterance, but it should be borne in mind that these particular aspects of meaning are subject to revision and addition: some may well collapse into others, while additional kinds of inference are undoubtedly waiting to be discovered (indeed, in the Chapters below, we shall be much concerned with how well each of these concepts is established).

The problem posed for the semantic theorist is how much to bite off – certainly no single coherent semantic theory can contain all these divergent aspects of meaning. If the theorist admits just the first kind of meaning component, the truth-conditional content, then at least (a) there are no conflicting principles for the inclusion or exclusion

a scope for semantics that would include all the conventional content of sentences, whereas (as we shall see) truth-conditional theories cannot have such a broad scope.

Table 1.1 *Elements of the communicational content of an utterance*

1. truth-conditions or entailments (Chapter 2 and *passim*)
2. conventional implicatures (Chapter 3)
3. presuppositions (Chapter 4)
4. felicity conditions (Chapter 5)
5. conversational implicature – generalized (Chapter 3)
6. conversational implicature – particularized (Chapter 3)
7. inferences based on conversational structure (Chapter 6)

Note: 1–2, and possibly also 3 and 4, are *conventional*; 3–7 are *defeasible* or context-dependent.

of phenomena and (b) semantic theory can be built on strictly homogeneous lines. Such a semantics will be narrow, and leave a great deal to pragmatics. On the other hand, if the theorist is determined that semantics should deal with all the conventional content of an utterance's significance (however exactly that is to be determined),¹² then semantic theory will deal with aspects 1 and 2, and quite likely 3 and possibly 4 as well. The inclusion of presupposition is awkward, however, for if presupposition is conventional, then it is also defeasible or context-dependent, and matters of context are best left for pragmatics. Thus, such a semantic theory (a) will contain conflicting principles for the inclusion (conventionality) and exclusion (defeasibility) of phenomena and (b) will have to be built on heterogeneous lines to include phenomena with quite different properties. Such difficulties might motivate a retreat to a semantic theory that deals only with aspects 1 and 2, i.e. conventional content that is non-defeasible, as an unhappy compromise.

In this book we shall assume, for working purposes, that a semantic

theory is truth-conditional. Apart from the fact that it avoids the above dilemmas, by claiming only the narrowest scope for semantics, such a theory recommends itself to the pragmatist for the following reasons. First, it is the only kind of theory now available that is precise and predictive enough to make investigable the nature of a semantics/pragmatics boundary, or the interaction between the two components. Secondly, it is arguable that most other theories, e.g. those based on semantic components, can be subsumed within it, in so far as they are built on consistent and logical lines. Thirdly, it is perhaps still the kind of theory with the most support in linguistic and philosophical circles, despite many dissenters and many unresolved problems. Finally, many of the issues in pragmatics have arisen historically from this particular vantage point, and to understand them one must at least at first approach from the same direction. But ultimately, the pragmatist may do well to remain agnostic, whatever semantic theory is assumed for working purposes.

The point here, however, is that whatever kind of semantic theory is adopted, many aspects of meaning in a broad sense simply cannot be accommodated if the theory is to have an internal coherence and consistency. From what we now know about the nature of meaning, a hybrid or modular account seems inescapable: there remains the hope that with two components, a semantics and a pragmatics working in tandem, each can be built on relatively homogeneous and systematic lines. Such a hybrid theory will almost certainly be simpler and more principled than a single amorphous and heterogeneous theory of semantics.

So the notion that pragmatics might be the study of aspects of meaning not covered in semantics certainly has some cogency. But we need to know how the broad sense of meaning, on which the definition relies, is to be delimited. This broad sense should include the ironic, metaphorical and implicit communicative content of an utterance, and so it cannot be restricted to the conventional content of what is said. But does it include *all* the inferences that can be made from (a) what is said and (b) all the available facts about the world known to participants? Suppose that Moriarty says that his watch broke, and from this Sherlock Holmes infers that he perpetrated the crime: although the information may have been indirectly conveyed, we should be loath to say that Moriarty communicated it. For communication involves the notions of intention and agency, and only

¹² The notion of conventional content is clearer intuitively than it is theoretically; for example, we would want to say that the term *genius* has the conventional content 'exceptional intellect' or the like, even though it may be predicated ironically, and thus convey the non-conventional meaning 'exceptional idiot'. Such a distinction would seem to rest on the distinction between content that is inherent or 'given' (cf. the Saussurean notion of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign) and meaning that may be derived by general principles of inference taking contextual factors into account. See Lewis, 1969 for an important philosophical analysis of the concept of convention, which stresses the essentially arbitrary nature of any convention. See also Morgan, 1978; Searle, 1979b on the notion *literal meaning*.

those inferences that are openly intended to be conveyed can properly be said to have been communicated. To help us draw a line between the incidental transfer of information, and communication proper, we may appeal to an important idea of the philosopher Grice (1957). Distinguishing between what he calls **natural meaning** (as in *Those black clouds mean rain*), and **non-natural meaning** or **meaning-*nn*** (equivalent to the notion of intentional communication), Grice gives the following characterization of meaning-*nn*.¹³

- (10) S *meant-*nn** *z* by uttering U if and only if:
 (i) S intended U to cause some effect *z* in recipient H
 (ii) S intended (i) to be achieved simply by H recognizing that intention (i)

Here, S stands for speaker (in the case of spoken communication; for sender or communicator in other cases); H for hearer, or more accurately, the intended recipient; "uttering U" for utterance of a linguistic token, i.e. a sentence part, sentence, or string of sentences or sentence parts (or the production of non-linguistic communicative acts); and *z* for (roughly) some belief or volition invoked in H.

Such a definition is likely to be opaque at first reading, but what it essentially states is that communication consists of the 'sender' intending to cause the 'receiver' to think or do something, just by getting the 'receiver' to recognize that the 'sender' is trying to cause that thought or action. So communication is a complex kind of intention that is achieved or satisfied just by being recognized. In the process of communication, the 'sender's' communicative intention becomes **mutual knowledge** to 'sender' (S) and 'receiver' (H), i.e. S knows that H knows that S knows that H knows (and so ad infinitum) that S has this particular intention.¹⁴ Attaining this state of mutual knowledge of a communicative intention is to have successfully communicated. A simple illustration may help to clarify the concept: it distinguishes between two kinds of 'boos', or

¹³ There is a slight rephrasing of Grice's (1957) formulation here, legitimated, I hope, by Schiffer's (1972: 14) discussion.

¹⁴ The concept of mutual knowledge is discussed in Lewis, 1969, and Schiffer, 1972: 30ff, and is of considerable potential importance to pragmatic theory; e.g. one may want to say that a speaker *presupposes* what speaker and addressee mutually know (although there are difficulties with this view see Chapter 4 below). Schiffer (1972: 39) argues that the definition of *meaning-*nn** should in fact make explicit reference to the concept of mutual knowledge. For a recent collection of papers on the subject see Smith, 1982.

attempts to frighten someone. Suppose I leap out from behind a tree, and by sheer surprise frighten you. I have caused an effect in you by 'natural' means. But now suppose that you know I am behind the tree, you are expecting me to leap out, and I know you know all that: I can still (maybe) frighten you by leaping out, just by getting you to realize that I intend to frighten you. Only the second is an instance of communication (meaning-*nn*) in Grice's sense. Grice intended his definition of communication to cover such non-verbal cases, but we will be concerned here (and henceforth) only with those cases where linguistic behaviour is part of the means whereby the communicative intention is recognized.

A puzzle that immediately arises is how this complex reflexive communicative intention is meant to be recognized by the recipient. Surely, one could argue, it can only be recognized by knowledge of some convention that U means *z*; but in that case we can do away with talk of complex intentions and construct an account of communication based directly on the notion of conventional signal. But this misses Grice's essential insight, namely that what the speaker means by U is not necessarily closely related to the meaning of U at all. Indeed U may have no conventional meaning, which allows for the creation of new terms, nonce expressions, and thus ultimately for some aspects of language change (for an explanation of how these communications may be understood, see Schiffer, 1972: Chapter V). But crucial for pragmatics, Grice's theory explains how there can be interesting discrepancies between **speaker-meaning** (Grice's meaning-*nn*) and **sentence-meaning**.¹⁵ For example, *Linguistics is fascinating* said ironically may be intended by the speaker to communicate 'Linguistics is deadly boring'. Further, there appear to be general conventions about the use of language that require (or, perhaps, merely recommend) a certain degree of implicitness in

¹⁵ This distinction is sometimes talked about in terms of **conveyed meaning** vs. **literal meaning**. In this book, instead of the notion literal meaning, we shall prefer the terms **sentence-meaning** or **conventional content** (the latter to cover linguistic expressions that are not necessarily sentences), although it is hard to do without the adjectival uses of *literal*. The reader is warned that none of these concepts is entirely clear (see e.g. Gazdar, 1979a: 157ff; Searle, 1979b: Chapter 5). There is a possible distinction between the notions sentence-meanings (one idiomatic, the other compositional) but only one literal meaning (the compositional, non-idiomatic reading). But we shall not exploit this distinction below.

communication, with the consequence that it is virtually ensured that what the speaker means by any utterance U is not exhausted by the meaning of the linguistic form uttered (see Chapter 3 below). How then is the full communicative intention to be recognized? By taking into account, not only the meaning of U, but also the precise mechanisms (like irony, or general assumptions of a certain level of implicitness) which may cause a divergence between the meaning of U and what is communicated by the utterance of U in a particular context. Much of this book is concerned with spelling out these mechanisms which, like other aspects of linguistic knowledge, we use daily in an unconscious way.

If we now adopt Grice's *meaning- π* as the scope of meaning in the definition of pragmatics in (9), we shall include most of the phenomena that we want to include, like the ironic, metaphorical and indirect implications of what we say (elements 5, 6 and 7 in Table 1.1), and exclude the unintended inferences that intuitively have no part to play in a theory of communication. It should be added that there are a number of philosophical problems with Grice's theory (see e.g. Schiffer, 1972), but they do not seem to vitiate the value of the central idea.

We now have some sketch of the scope of meaning that is referred to in the definition, namely all that can be said to have been communicated, in Grice's sense, by the use of a linguistic token in a context. But can we give as a definition of pragmatics nothing but the complement of, or the residue left by, semantics in the field of meaning? Is there no conceptual integrity to the scope of pragmatics itself? We might try to find such a conceptual unity by making the distinction between sentence-meaning and utterance-meaning, and hope then to be able to equate semantics with the study of sentence-meaning and pragmatics with the study of utterance-meaning.

The distinction between **sentence** and **utterance** is of fundamental importance to both semantics and pragmatics. Essentially, we want to say that a sentence is an abstract theoretical entity defined within a theory of grammar, while an utterance is the issuance of a sentence, a sentence-analogue, or sentence-fragment, in an actual context. Empirically, the relation between an utterance and a corresponding sentence may be quite obscure (e.g. the utterance may be elliptical, or contain sentence-fragments or 'false-starts'), but it is customary (after Bar-Hillel) to think of an utterance as the pairing of a sentence

and a context, namely the context in which the sentence was uttered. It is important, but in practice exceedingly difficult, to maintain this distinction at all times in the study of meaning. As an index of the difficulty, one may note that linguists frequently oscillate between assigning notions like *presupposition*, *illocutionary force*, *truth condition* to sentences or utterances, although important theoretical consequences follow from the choice. One may claim that the confusion here results from the need for yet further distinctions: thus Lyons (1977a) advocates distinctions between text-sentences and system-sentences, sentence-types and sentence-tokens, utterance-types and utterance-tokens, and utterance-acts and utterance-products. It is unlikely, though, that we can handle all these if we cannot make the first distinction systematically (and the alert reader can no doubt find mistakes of this sort within this book). For expository reasons, we shall need to use the word *utterance* in various ways in this book, but where it is used to contrast with *sentence* it should be taken in the sense advocated by Bar-Hillel, as a sentence (or sometimes string of sentences) paired with a context.¹⁶ And this is the sense relevant to the proposal that semantics is concerned with sentence-meaning, and pragmatics with utterance-meaning.

Many authors accept this equation implicitly, but there are a number of problems with it. In the first place, in the (rare) cases where sentence-meaning exhausts utterance-meaning (i.e. where the speaker meant exactly what he said, no more, no less), the same content would be assigned both to semantics and pragmatics. In other words, we would need to restrict the notion of utterance-meaning in such a way that we subtract sentence-meaning, and in that case we are back to a definition of pragmatics by residue. But there are other problems: for there are aspects of sentence-meaning which, at least on truth-conditional or other narrow semantic theories, cannot be accounted for within semantic theory. Such aspects are conventional but non-truth-conditional elements of sentence-meaning, e.g. what we shall call *conventional implicatures* and (at least on many theories)

¹⁶ Here the simplifying assumption is made that what speakers produce – Lyons's *utterance-products* – are equivalent to sentences, Lyons's *system-sentences* or theoretical entities. The limitations of such an assumption will be made clear in Chapter 6. The other main way in which the term *utterance* will be used is as a pre-theoretical term to label "any stretch of talk, by one person, before and after which there is silence on behalf of that person" (Harris, 1951: 14; adopted in Lyons, 1977a: 26).

presuppositions, and perhaps even aspects of *illocutionary force* (concepts expounded in the Chapters below). On the assumption of a truth-conditional semantics, such aspects of sentence-meaning would have to be dealt with in pragmatics, and so there can be no direct equation of sentence-meaning and semantics. On the same assumption, there is another overwhelming problem for the proposal: for it is not sentences but rather utterances that make definite statements, and thus can sensibly be assigned truth conditions (as philosophers have long noted; see e.g. Strawson, 1950; Stalnaker, 1972). The argument rests in part on the pervasive nature of deixis (see Chapter 2 below) in natural languages, for sentences like (11) are true or false only relative to contextual parameters, thanks to the fact that *I*, *now* and the tense of *am* are variables given specific values only on particular occasions of utterance (i.e. (11) is true only when spoken by certain speakers, those who are sixty-three, or true of individuals only at certain times, when they are sixty-three):

(11) I am now sixty-three years old

These facts seem to establish that truth conditions must be assigned to utterances, i.e. sentences with their associated contexts of utterance, not to sentences alone (or, if one likes, truth conditions include context conditions). So again, it makes no sense to equate semantics with the study of sentence-meaning.

There is another formulation of essentially the same proposal: semantics should be concerned with meaning out of context, or non-context-dependent meaning, and pragmatics with meaning in context. The strong version of this, apparently held by Katz (1977), assumes that there is some given, natural level of context-independent meaning, and that sentence-meaning can be described independently and prior to utterance-meaning. But as we have argued, and will illustrate below, this does not seem to be the case. For, if one accepts a truth-conditional semantics then one is forced to state truth conditions on sentences-in-contexts, or if one prefers (as Katz would) that semantics is concerned with aspects of meaning assigned by convention to linguistic forms, then one includes context-dependent aspects of meaning within semantics. A weaker version of the same proposal would be to consider that semantics is an abstraction away from context-dependent utterances, in so far as this is possible (as suggested by Carnap, 1959: 13; Lyons, 1977a: 591). In any case, it does not seem that the distinction between sentence-meaning and

utterance-meaning can be relied upon to clarify the distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

We are left with the unrefined definition that pragmatics is concerned with the study of those aspects of meaning not covered in semantics. Despite many advantages, such a definition fails to draw attention to the unifying characteristics of pragmatic phenomena. Let us turn to another definition that would give the context-dependent nature of such phenomena more centrality:

(12) Pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding

Here the term **language understanding** is used in the way favoured by workers in artificial intelligence to draw attention to the fact that understanding an utterance involves a great deal more than knowing the meanings of the words uttered and the grammatical relations between them. Above all, understanding an utterance involves the making of *inferences* that will connect what is said to what is mutually assumed or what has been said before.

The strengths of such a definition are as follows. It recognizes that pragmatics is essentially concerned with inference (Thomason, 1977): given a linguistic form uttered in a context, a pragmatic theory must account for the inference of presuppositions, implicatures, illocutionary force and other pragmatic implications. Secondly, unlike the definition in (8), it does not make the distinction between semantics and pragmatics along the encoded/unencoded line; this is important because, as we shall see, there is still controversy over whether such pragmatic implications as presuppositions or illocutionary force are or are not encoded or grammaticalized in linguistic forms. Thirdly, it includes most aspects of the study of principles of language usage, for there seems to be a general principle of the following kind: for each systematic set of constraints on the use of language, there will be a corresponding set of inference-procedures that will be applied to language understanding (see Levinson, 1979a).

The weaknesses are, unfortunately, equally clear. First, pragmatics will then include the study of the interaction between linguistic knowledge and the entirety of participants' knowledge of the world (or 'encyclopaedic knowledge'). For example, in order to understand the little story in (13), one needs to know the following assorted facts: presents are usually bought with money; piggy-banks are used to hold money; piggy-banks are generally made of a dense material like metal

or plastic; money inside a container of dense material will generally rattle, etc.

- (13) Jill wanted to get Bill a birthday present, so she went and found her piggy-bank; she shook it, but there was no noise; she would have to make Bill a present

This example comes from work in artificial intelligence (Charniak, 1972) which is concerned with the attempt to translate the significance of ordinary utterances into an explicit representation that might be used by a computer to produce 'intelligent' responses. The immense difficulties of such translations have served to emphasize just how great a role assumed knowledge plays in the understanding of utterances.

However, this interpretive dependence on background assumptions has been used as an argument against the possibility of any systematic study of language understanding: if the set of potentially relevant assumptions is coincident with the total set of facts and beliefs held by participants, then to study this interpretive process will be to study the total sum of human knowledge and beliefs (Katz & Fodor, 1963). The argument is clearly fallacious: just as rules of logical deduction can be stated which will apply to an indefinitely large set of propositions, so it is quite possible that the *principles* that underlie the interaction between utterances and assumptions (however particular they may be) can be simply and rigorously stated. Nevertheless, if pragmatics is to be considered a *component* within linguistic theory (a question to which we shall return), it may be that to include such principles is indeed to include too much. But little serious thought has been given to this problem.

Another difficulty facing this definition or scope for pragmatics, is that it calls for some explicit characterization of the notion of **context**. In an earlier definition, where pragmatics was restricted to encoded aspects of context, one could claim that the relevant aspects of context should not be specified in advance but rather discovered by a survey of the world's languages. Here though, unless one wants to claim that context is whatever (excluding semantics) produces inferences, some characterization of context seems required. What then might one mean by *context*? First, one needs to distinguish between actual situations of utterance in all their multiplicity of features, and the selection of just those features that are culturally and linguistically relevant to the production and interpretation of

utterances (see e.g. Van Dijk, 1976: 29). The term *context*, of course, labels the latter (although **context-description** might have been a more appropriate term, as Bar-Hillel (1970: 80) suggests). But can we say in advance what such features are likely to be? Lyons boldly lists the following (1977a: 574), over and above universal principles of logic and language usage: (i) knowledge of *role* and *status* (where role covers both role in the speech event, as speaker or addressee, and social role, and status covers notions of relative social standing), (ii) knowledge of spatial and temporal *location*, (iii) knowledge of *formality level*, (iv) knowledge of the *medium* (roughly the code or style appropriate to a channel, like the distinction between written and spoken varieties of a language), (v) knowledge of appropriate *subject matter*, (vi) knowledge of appropriate *province* (or domain determining the *register* of a language). Ochs (1979c), in an extended discussion of the notion, notes 'The scope of context is not easy to define ... one must consider the *social and psychological world in which the language user operates at any given time*' (p.1), 'it includes minimally, language users' beliefs and assumptions about temporal, spatial, and social settings; prior, ongoing, and future actions (verbal, non-verbal), and the state of knowledge and attentiveness of those participating in the social interaction in hand' (p.5). Both Lyons and Ochs stress that context must not be understood to exclude linguistic features, since such features often invoke the relevant contextual assumptions (a point made nicely by Gumperz (1977) who calls such linguistic features *contextualization cues*). Certainly, in this book, we shall need to include participants' beliefs about most of the above parameters, including the place of the current utterance within the sequence of utterances that makes up the discourse. Other authors have been more coy: 'I have left the central concept of this paper, namely *pragmatic context*, in rather thorough vagueness, and this for the simple reason that I see no clear way to reduce the vagueness at the moment' (Bar-Hillel, 1970: 80). Although, along the lines suggested by Lyons or Ochs, we may be able to reduce the vagueness by providing lists of relevant contextual features, we do not seem to have available any theory that will predict the relevance of all such features, and this is perhaps an embarrassment to a definition that seems to rely on the notion of context.¹⁷

¹⁷ For particular purposes, pragmaticists are wont to restrict the nature of context in line with the problems in hand: thus in a work dealing mostly with presupposition and implicature, 'contexts' are sets of propositions