

# INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

## Pragmatics: An overview

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# WHAT IS PRAGMATICS?

- Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that deals with **use-dependent** aspects of meaning.
  - (1) Dolphins are mammals.
  - (2) A Do dolphins lay eggs?  
B Well, dolphins are mammals.  
↪ 'No (dolphins don't lay eggs).'
  - (3) A Do dolphins breastfeed their offspring?  
B Well, dolphins are mammals.  
↪ 'Yes (dolphins breastfeed their offspring).'
- Compare: Semantics deals primarily with **use-independent** aspects of meaning.
  - (4) *Dolphins are mammals* is true if and only if dolphins are mammals.
- Semantics alone provides no answer to why the statement can be used as in (2) or (3).

# THE INTERDISCIPLINARY NATURE OF PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics deals with phenomena at the interface between language system and language use. Depending on one's viewpoint, the relevant interface can be between:

language system	language use
langue	parole
competence	performance
form	function
logic	natural language

Besides dealing with some core theoretical issues of pragmatics, we will also take a look at some experimental – and partly also psycholinguistic overtones.

# PRESENT TRADITION

From philosophy and logic to natural language; from theory to data

- Logic and analytic philosophy (Frege 1879; Russell 1903; Wittgenstein 1922)
- Speech act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969)
- Natural language as formal language (Montague 1970, 1973)
- Formal semantics (Partee 1975)
- Formal pragmatics (Stalnaker 1972, 1974; Grice 1975)
- Formal approaches to information structure (Hajičová 1973; Reinhart 1981; Rooth 1985)
- Experimental approaches to formal semantics and pragmatics (Noveck & Sperber 2004)

# TOPICS TO BE COVERED

- Semantics vs. pragmatics: Where is the border?
- Functions of language: What is language for?
- Speech acts: Doing things with words
- Presuppositions: Conditions for meanings to arise.
- Conversational maxims: How does a rational conversation proceed?
- Conversational implicatures: Conveying more than what is said
- Information structure: How do we structure information in an utterance?
- Givenness: Encoding what has already been mentioned
- Questions and answers: A formal model of conversation
- Focus: Alternative meanings

## READING AND WATCHING TIPS

Korta, Kepa & John Perry. 2019. Pragmatics. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University.  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/pragmatics/>

YouTube videos on Pragmatics:

- Evan Ashworth: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsPswzOBsKo>
- Crash Course Linguistics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPwPk-YgvjQ>

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