

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE AND ITS USE

Semantics vs. pragmatics

Radek Šimík



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

ASPECTS OF PRAGMATIC MEANING

How does PRAGMATICS differ from semantics?

- Pragmatic meaning is **not derivable purely from form**.
- It is **non-literal** and **non-conventional**.
- **Semantics** contributes to pragmatic meaning, but so do a **range of other factors**, including the utterance situation, speaker's beliefs and knowledge, goals, wishes, attitudes, intentions, or mutual relations among discourse participants, including beliefs about each other.
- A broader view of pragmatics might even include **cultural or cognitive factors**.
- The choice of particular **formal devices** is correlated with particular pragmatic inferences.
- Pragmatics does not just concern meaning, but also (linguistic) **behavior** (→ speech acts).

INTERFACE BETWEEN SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS

The division line between semantics and pragmatics is **not strict**.

- Semantics of sentences \approx truth-conditions
- But there are many cases where pragmatics is needed to “fix” the truth-conditions (Récanati 2010):
 - (1) She’s looking for a mouse.
- There are at least two aspects of (1)’s meaning in need of pragmatic “aid”:
 - Reference of *she*
 - Denotation of *mouse*

PRAGMATIC ASPECTS OF SEMANTIC MEANING

- meaning/reference of INDEXICALS Braun 2017
 - (2) Last week Rachel said that *she* wanted to come **here tomorrow**.
- ambiguities of MODAL expressions Portner 2009; Hacquard 2011
 - (3) Sue **could** be a teacher.
- QUANTIFIER RESTRICTION Stanley & Szabó 2000
 - (4) **Everybody** is hungry.
- meaning/reference of ANAPHORIC expressions King & Lewis 2018
 - (5) Henry told Norman that **he** was lucky.
- meaning of VAGUE expressions Sorensen 2018
 - (6) Henry is **bald**.

SEMANTIC ASPECTS OF PRAGMATIC MEANING

(7) A Who would guess that Tom comes from Germany?

B₁ I would.

'Ben would guess that Tom comes from Germany.'

B₂ That's right.

'Ben agrees that nobody would guess that Tom comes from Germany.'

Semantics of (7A):

- question

Pragmatics of (7A):

- 'Nobody would guess that Tom comes from Germany.'

Reaction (7B₁):

- B responds to the semantic meaning and **provides an answer**

Reaction (7B₂):

- B responds to the pragmatic meaning and **agrees that it is true**

BIDIRECTIONAL RELATION

Pragmatics in semantics

Semantics is to some extent dependent on pragmatic factors, such as utterance situation, context, or speaker intentions.

Semantics in pragmatics

Pragmatic reasoning can give rise to meanings (inferences) which can be defined in semantic terms; they have their own truth-conditions.

PRAGMATICS AND FORM

The choice of expressions can have pragmatic consequences:

- Honorific grammatical endings

McCready 2019

(8) *Situation*: Addressing an adult stranger in the street

(8) Máš / Máte otevřený batoh.
have.2SG have.2.HON open bag
'Your bag is open.'

- Different ways to describe the same referent

Gutzmann 2019

- (9) a. Mr. President would like to use the bathroom.
b. The old drunkard would like to use the bathroom.

PRAGMATICS AND FORM

- Pragmatic/Discourse/Modal particles

Grosz 2021

(10) A **Vždyt** Karel je v Praze.

PRT Karel is in Prague

(i) Semantics: 'Karel is in Prague.'

(ii) Pragmatics: 'You've already known that Karel is in Prague.'

B To není pravda.

that NEG.is true

(i) ✓ 'It's not true that he's in Prague.'

(ii) ✗ 'It's not true that I've known it.'

READING TIPS

Gutzmann, Daniel. 2021. Semantics vs. pragmatics. In Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann, and Thomas E. Zimmermann (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to semantics*. John Wiley & Sons.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem049>

Szabó, Zoltán Gendler. 2008. The distinction between semantics and pragmatics. In Ernest Lepore and Barry C. Smith (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199552238.003.0017>

Récanati, François. 2010. *Truth-conditional pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

REFERENCES

- Braun, David. 2017. Indexicals. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/indexicals/>.
- Grosz, Patrick. 2021. Discourse particles. In Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann & Thomas E. Zimmermann (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to semantics*, John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem047>.
- Gutzmann, Daniel. 2019. *The grammar of expressivity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198812128.001.0001>.
- Gutzmann, Daniel. 2021. Semantics vs. pragmatics. In Daniel Gutzmann, Lisa Matthewson, Cécile Meier, Hotze Rullmann & Thomas E. Zimmermann (eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell companion to semantics*, John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118788516.sem049>.
- Hacquard, Valentine. 2011. Modality. In Klaus von Heusinger, Claudia Maienborn & Paul Portner (eds.), *Semantics: An international handbook of natural language meaning*, vol. 2, chap. 58, 1484–1515. Berlin: de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110255072.1484>.
- King, Jeffrey C. & Karen S. Lewis. 2018. Anaphora. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/anaphora/>.
- McCready, Elin. 2019. *The semantics and pragmatics of honorification: Register and social meaning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198821366.001.0001>.
- Portner, Paul. 2009. *Modality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Récanati, François. 2010. *Truth-conditional pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sorensen, Roy. 2018. Vagueness. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*, Stanford, CA: Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/vagueness/>.
- Stanley, Jason & Zoltán Gendler Szabó. 2000. On quantifier domain restriction. *Mind & Language* 15(2–3). 219–261. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0017.00130>.
- Szabó, Zoltán Gendler. 2008. The distinction between semantics and pragmatics. In Ernest Lepore & Barry C. Smith (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199552238.003.0017>.