Meaning in Interaction: an Introduction to Pragmatics

Jenny Thomas
Contents

Preface xiii
Acknowledgements xiv

1 What is pragmatics? 1
1.1 Introduction 1
1.2 Defining pragmatics 1
1.3 From abstract meaning to contextual meaning 2
   1.3.1 Assigning sense in context 5
   1.3.2 Assigning reference in context 8
   1.3.3 Structural ambiguity 12
   1.3.4 Interaction of sense, reference and structure 12
   1.3.5 Ambiguity and intentionality 14
1.4 Utterance meaning: first level of speaker meaning 16
   1.4.1 Importance of utterance meaning 16
1.5 Force: the second level of speaker meaning 18
   1.5.1 Understanding both utterance meaning and force 18
   1.5.2 Understanding utterance meaning but not force 19
   1.5.3 Understanding force but not utterance meaning 19
   1.5.4 Understanding neither utterance meaning nor force 20
   1.5.5 Interrelationship of utterance meaning and force 21
1.6 Definitions of pragmatics (revisited) 21
   1.6.1 Speaker meaning 21
   1.6.2 Utterance interpretation 22
   1.6.3 Pragmatics: meaning in interaction 22
1.7 Summary 23
2 Speech acts 28
2.1 J. L. Austin 28
2.2 Ordinary language philosophy 29
2.3 Logical positivism and truth conditional semantics 29
2.4 The performative hypothesis 32
   2.4.1 Metalinguistic performatives 33
   2.4.2 Ritual performatives 36
      2.4.2.1 Felicity conditions 37
      2.4.2.2 Explicit reference to felicity conditions 39
   2.4.3 Collaborative performatives 40
   2.4.4 Group performatives 41
   2.4.5 Overlap of categories 42
   2.4.6 Cross-cultural differences in use of performatives 42
   2.4.7 Collapse of Austin’s performative hypothesis 43
      2.4.7.1 The grammatical distinctiveness of performatives 44
      2.4.7.2 Do performatives always perform actions? 45
      2.4.7.3 How to do things without performative verbs 45
   2.4.8 Explicit and implicit performatives 47
2.5 Utterances as actions 49
   2.5.1 Locution, illocution, perlocution 49
   2.5.2 Speech acts 50
2.6 Conclusion 51

3 Conversational implicature 55
3.1 Introduction 55
3.2 H. P. Grice 56
3.3 Implicature 57
   3.3.1 Conventional implicature 57
   3.3.2 Conversational implicature 58
   3.3.3 Implicature and inference 58
3.4 The Cooperative Principle 61
3.5 The four conversational maxims 63
   3.5.1 Observing the maxims 64
   3.5.2 Non-observance of the maxims 64
3.6 Flouting a maxim 65
  3.6.1 Flouts necessitated by a clash between maxims 65
  3.6.2 Flouts which exploit a maxim 67
    3.6.2.1 Flouts exploiting the maxim of Quality 67
    3.6.2.2 Flouts exploiting the maxim of Quantity 69
    3.6.2.3 Flouts exploiting the maxim of Relation 70
    3.6.2.4 Flouts exploiting the maxim of Manner 71
3.7 Other categories of non-observance of the conversational maxims 72
  3.7.1 Violating a maxim 72
  3.7.2 Infringing a maxim 74
  3.7.3 Opting out of a maxim 74
  3.7.4 Suspending a maxim 76
3.8 Testing for implicature 78
  3.8.1 Non-detachability and non-conventionality 78
  3.8.2 Implicature changes 80
  3.8.3 Calculability 82
  3.8.4 Defeasibility 82
3.9 Conclusion 84

4 Approaches to pragmatics 87
4.1 Introduction 87
4.2 Problems with Grice's theory 87
  4.2.1 When is non-observance intentional? 88
  4.2.2 Distinguishing between types of non-observance 90
  4.2.3 Different nature of maxims 91
  4.2.4 Maxims may overlap 91
  4.2.5 Problems of calculability 92
4.3 Grice's informal approach 93
4.4 J. R. Searle 93
  4.4.1 Indirect speech acts 93
  4.4.2 Searle's conditions for speech acts 94
    4.4.2.1 Distinguishing speech acts 96
    4.4.2.2 Plugging the gaps in Searle's rules 98
    4.4.2.3 The speech act of apologizing: a case study 99
    4.4.2.4 Over-generality of rules 102
    4.4.2.5 The speech act of warning: a case study 103
x Contents

4.5 Searle’s formal approach to the categorization of speech acts 105
4.6 Rules versus principles 107
  4.6.1 Rules are all or nothing, principles are more or less 108
  4.6.2 Rules are exclusive, principles can co-occur 108
  4.6.3 Rules are constitutive, principles are regulative 109
  4.6.4 Rules are definite, principles are probabilistic 110
  4.6.5 Rules are conventional, principles are motivated 111
4.7 Conclusion 111

5 Pragmatics and indirectness 119
  5.1 Introduction 119
  5.2 Pragmatics and indirectness 120
    5.2.1 Intentional indirectness 120
    5.2.2 Indirectness is costly and risky 120
    5.2.3 Assumption of rationality 121
    5.2.4 The principle of expressibility 122
    5.2.5 Indirectness — an illustration 123
  5.3 How do we know how indirect to be? 124
    5.3.1 Power 124
    5.3.2 Social distance 128
    5.3.3 Size of imposition 130
    5.3.4 Rights and obligations 131
    5.3.5 The negotiation of pragmatic parameters 131
  5.4 Measuring indirectness 133
    5.4.1 The role of context in interpreting indirectness 136
    5.4.2 The role of belief in interpreting indirectness 137
    5.4.3 Background knowledge and interpreting indirectness 138
    5.4.4 The role of co-text in interpreting indirectness 138
    5.4.5 Goals and the interpretation of indirectness 139
  5.5 Why use indirectness? 142
    5.5.1 Interestingness 143
    5.5.2 Increasing the force of one’s message 144
    5.5.3 Competing goals 145
  5.6 Conclusion 146
6 Theories of politeness 149

6.1 Introduction 149
6.2 Delimiting the concept of politeness 149
   6.2.1 Politeness as a real-world goal 150
   6.2.2 Deference versus politeness 150
   6.2.3 Register 154
   6.2.4 Politeness as an utterance level phenomenon 155
   6.2.5 Politeness as a pragmatic phenomenon 157
6.3 Politeness explained in terms of principles and maxims 158
   6.3.1 Ambivalence and politeness 158
   6.3.2 Pragmatic principles 159
      6.3.2.1 The Tact maxim 160
      6.3.2.2 The Generosity maxim 162
      6.3.2.3 The Approbation maxim 162
      6.3.2.4 The Modesty maxim 163
      6.3.2.5 The Agreement maxim 165
      6.3.2.6 The Pollyanna Principle 166
   6.3.3 Problems with Leech's approach 167
6.4 Politeness and the management of face 168
   6.4.1 Face-threatening acts 169
      6.4.1.1 Superstrategies for performing face-threatening acts 169
      6.4.1.2 Performing an FTA without any redress (bald-on-record) 170
      6.4.1.3 Performing an FTA with redress (positive politeness) 171
      6.4.1.4 Performing an FTA with redress (negative politeness) 172
      6.4.1.5 Performing an FTA using off-record politeness 173
      6.4.1.6 Do not perform FTA 174
   6.4.2 Criticisms of Brown and Levinson 176
6.5 Politeness viewed as a conversational contract 176
6.6 Politeness measured along pragmatic scales 177
6.7 Conclusion 178