Handout 10: Pragmatics I

1. Introduction

In contrast to semantics, which is about word meaning and sentence meaning, pragmatics deals with utterance meaning (German ‘Äußerungsbedeutung’).

(1) A: “Don’t you think that Bill is a pain in the neck?” (said on a party)
   B: “I like your tie.”
   Sentence meaning: ‘The speaker communicates that the addressee’s tie meets his taste.’
   Utterance meaning: ‘Shut up, Bill is standing behind you.’

(2) “John Smith is a friendly student who is always well dressed. He has never come late and offered me a cigarette on various occasions.” (letter of reference addressed to DAAD)
   Utterance meaning: ‘J. Smith’s professional skills are very poor and I do not consider him a suitable candidate for your exchange programme.’

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Table 1: Pragmatics as complementing semantics (after Kortmann: 225)

context — linguistic (‘cotext’)

context — non-linguistic (‘context’ in the narrow sense)

2. Deixis

- Words, as opposed to entire utterances (cf. (1)-(2)) can also be context-dependent
- Note attached to my office door: I will be here in 10 minutes.

| time (temporal deixis): Yesterday I went to the movies. |
| place (local deixis): Peter is here. |
| person (person deixis): You are my best friend. |

- origo = the centre of orientation (the speaker and the time and place of utterance)
  - the origo may be shifted: When you read these lines, I’ll already be gone.

- cross-linguistic differences:
  - (4) Ich komme morgen zu dir nach Hause.
  - (5) *Voy a venir a tu casa mañana.
  - (6) *Please give me this apple over there! (OK: that apple)
  - (7) Geben Sie mir bitte diesen Apfel dahinten!
Further ‘non-central’ deictic dimensions: social, discourse, manner and degree deixis

Exercise 1: Give one example of each of these four types (from English or any other language).

- deictic expressions must be distinguished from anaphora (the use of ‘pro-forms’ to refer to an entity that has already been introduced in the text/conversation)

3. Speech acts
- Based on the assumption that language use is not normally limited to exchanging information, speech act theory (Austin 1962, Searle 1969) tries to classify the different functions that utterances can have in a communicative context.

3.1 Components of speech acts
(1) The form and (context-independent) meaning of the relevant sentence: locution.
(11) The function of an utterance (or: the speaker’s communicative intention) in a given situation: illocution (the most important aspect of speech acts).
(111) The intended or actual effects of a locutionary act: perlocution.

3.2 Types of speech acts
Assertives: Madrid is the capital of Spain. (Sp represents a state of affairs. Assertives commit speakers to the truth of the proposition)
Commissives: I promise to marry your sister! (Sp commits him-/herself to the performance of an action)
Directives: Please close the door! (an attempt by Sp[eaker] to get H[earer] to do sth.)
Expressives: Thank you for the nice present! (Sp expresses a psychological state about the situation or state of affairs denoted by the proposition)
Declaratives: I hereby pronounce you man and wife. (Sp brings about a change in the world by uttering a sentence. Declaratives must be tied to an institutional context in order for the speech act to be effective)

- illocutionary acts are defined in terms of felicity conditions
  - propositional content: e.g. you cannot promise sth. which has already happened
  - preparatory condition: e.g. you cannot promise sth. which the hearer does not want
  - sincerity condition: e.g. you cannot promise sth. which you cannot put into practice
  - essential condition (‘illocutionary point’): constitutes the speech act, e.g. the essential condition of a commisive is to commit the speaker to performing the action described in the propositional content.

3.3 Indirect speech acts
An explicit speech act functions as a (different) implicit speech act:
(21) There is a draught here. (direct = assertive, indirect= request)
(22) Could you pass me the pepper? (direct = question, illocution = request)

Indirect speech acts are standardized to different degrees:
(23) There’s a coffee machine around the corner. Do you happen to pass by?
(24) Could you tell me the time?
(25) Could you tell me the time, please!

Reading for Pragmatics II: Kortmann 235-247; Cruse 363-373