Linguistic Pragmatics

The Meaning of Speech

Areas of Interest of Pragmatics

- The study of the speaker's meaning, what the speaker's intentions and beliefs are.

- The study of the meaning in context, and the influence that a given context can have on the message.

- The study of implicatures, i.e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed.

- The study of relative distance, both social and physical, between speakers in order to understand what determines the choice of what is said and what is not said.
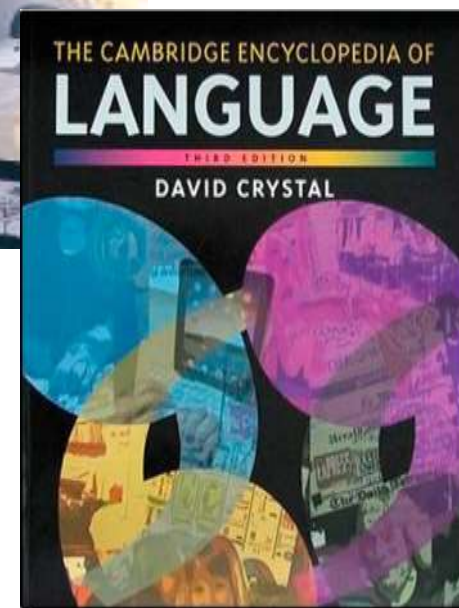
Pragmatics

- The study of how language is used in context. It seeks to explain aspects of meaning which cannot be found in the plain sense of words or structures.
  - "Can I get you a drink?"
  - The person asking really wants to open a conversation with the other, the offering of a drink is not the primary purpose.

David Crystal about Pragmatics

a British linguist academic and author,

lecturer on the English language at the University College in London, with a worldwide reputation and over 100 books to his name. He is honorary professor of linguistics at the University of Wales.

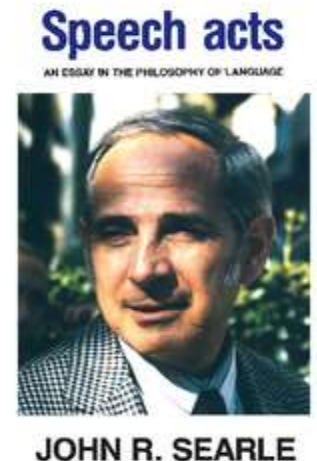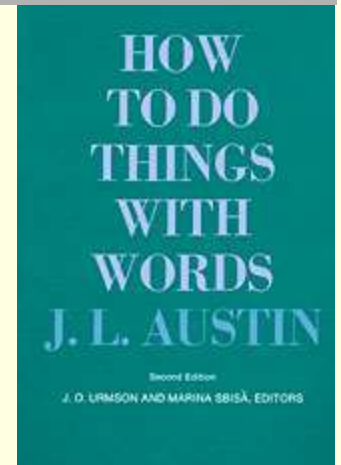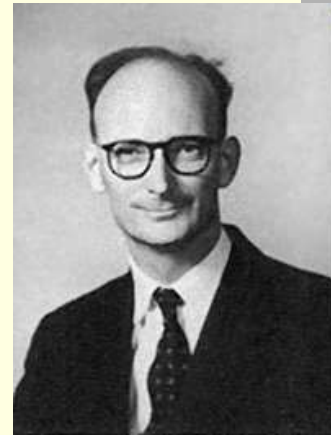ENGLISH LANG- Pragmatics -David Crystal.mp4

Domain of Pragmatics

"Pragmatics is the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and the users of those forms."

Later Contributions

- In 1962, J.Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* for the first time explained how the form of language relates to its meaning and function.

- He challenged the common thought that sentences simply state facts. He argued that many forms of sentences also perform a certain kind of action.

- In 1969, J.Searle's "Speech Acts" continued the exploration commenced by Austin.

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS

J. L. AUSTIN

Second Edition
J. O. URMSON AND MARINA SBISÀ, EDITORS

Speech acts
AN ESSAY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

JOHN R. SEARLE

Pragmatics Example

- Consider the utterance: "You got it?"
  - Taken out of context the meaning is ambiguous.
- Put in context:
  - "You got it?"
  - "Yes, I *have* it with me."
- Or another context:
  - "You got it?"
  - "No, I still don't *understand*."
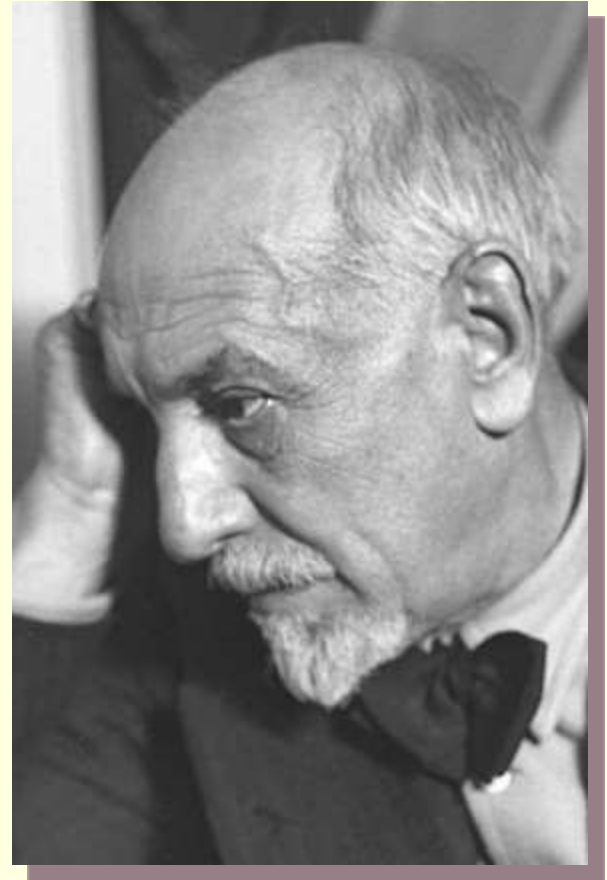- The meaning depends on the context of the utterance.

Different Points of View

Italian author Pirandello in his famous play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), stressed the difficulty in the process of communication.

"We think we understand one another but we don't because each one of us uses a different frame of mind."

-Pirandello

Pirandello's Six Characters

Pirandello's story explores how six people all see reality from their own point of view. All are correct, but they are unable to communicate because they speak literally. Without additional meaning to their commincations, the characters encounter a series of mishaps and comic tragedy.

This is an example of why we must make distinctions between what is actually spoken and what is the implied meaning.

Sentence vs. Utterance

- A sentence is a string of words without non-linguistical context.
  - This is the idea of the reality that doesn't change.
  - It is abstract.

- An utterance is an example of a speech act in a specific context.
  - This is the concept of our reality as we interpret it.
  - It is concrete.

Ferdinand de Saussure

- He thought that language had an analyzable structure, composed of parts that can be defined in relation to others parts.

- As a founder of linguistics (study of language) and semiotics (study of signs as part of social life), his ideas paved the way for the formation of pragmatics.

Speech Acts Theory

- Speech acts refer to sentences that not only describe or report information, but also help speakers to accomplish things.

- Speech acts include orders, requests, warnings, verdicts, promises, and apologies.

- Speech acts can be variously performed and can be more or less explicit and transparent.

- The optimal situation is when a speaker's intention becomes clear to the hearer, but that is not always the case.

Three Aspects of Speech Acts

- **<u>Locutionary</u>**: (or utterance): the production of sounds, words, phrases and sentences. (actual form)
    - Ex. "I'm thirsty."

- **<u>Illocutionary</u>**: what we perform in saying something, e.g. reporting, suggesting, asking, promising. (intended function)
    - "Can I have a drink?"

- **<u>Perlocutionary</u>**: the ultimate effect we produce in speaking. (intended effect)
    - The utterance serves as a request for a drink.

Five Types of Illocutionary
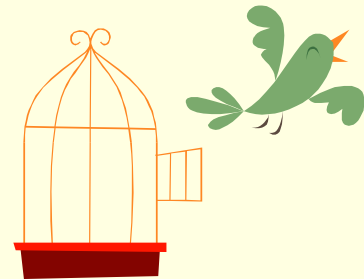
- **<u>Commissives</u>**: the speaker commits himself to a (future) course of action.
  - Ex. "I will take you to the park tomorrow."

- **<u>Declaratives</u>**: the speaker alters the external condition of an object or situation simply by speaking.
  - Ex. "You are free to go."

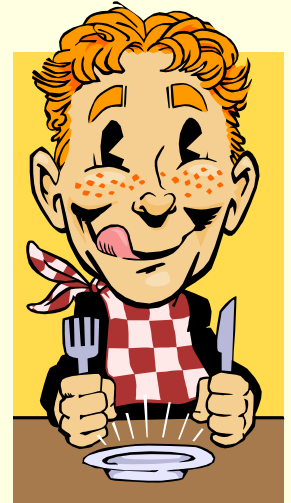- **<u>Directives</u>**: the speaker tries to make someone do something.
  - Ex. "Please stay in your seat."

Five Types of Illocutionary

- **<u>Expressives</u>**: the speaker expresses an attitude to or about something
  - Ex. "I appreciate the meal, it was delicious!"

- **<u>Representatives</u>**: the speaker asserts a proposition to be true
  - Ex. "She said she was late because she missed the bus."

More Examples

- Commissives
  - Ex. "I'll clean that for you."
- Declaratives
  - Ex. "You have passed your exam."
- Directives
  - Ex. "Don't eat that!"
- Expressives
  - Ex. "I think the Mona Lisa is amazing!"
- Representatives
  - Ex. "She believes he lives in Odessa."

He lives in Odessa.

Presuppositions

- What a speaker assumes about a given context when performing a speech act.
  - Ex. "Paris is a modern city."
  - This assumes Paris is a city.
  🔊

- The presupposition is the same even if the statement is made negative.
  - Ex. "Paris is *not* a modern city."
  - This still assumes Paris is a city.
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Further Examples

- Example 1:
  - "I like your new shoes."
  - "I don't like your new shoes."
  - Both presuppose that there are new shoes.

- Example 2:
  - "Do you love your husband?"
  - "Don't you love your husband?"
  - Both presuppose that there is a husband.

Direct Speech Acts

- **<u>Direct speech act</u>** – is when the content of communication may be identical, or almost identical, with the intention of the speaker.
  - "Will you wash the dishes tonight?"
  - "Yes, I will if you want me to."

Indirect Speech Acts

- **Indirect speech act** – the speakers intention is not expressed directly by the content of the communication.

  - "Would you like to meet me for coffee?"

  - "I have a class."

  - Using the utterance "I have a class" is an indirect response because the literal meaning of "I have a class" does not contain any form of rejection.

Direct Requests

- **<u>Direct request</u>**: when the speaker makes a request with a statement that matches the intention of the communication.
  - Ex. "Answer the phone."

  - Semantic Aggravator: added to a direct request to make it imperative.
    - Ex. "Answer the phone *right now*!"

  - Semantic Mitagator: added to a direct request to make it polite or formal.
    - Ex. "*Could you please* answer the phone?"

Indirect Requests

- **<u>Indirect request</u>**: when a speaker makes a statement about something or a situation but intends for someone to take some action as well.

  - Ex. "The telephone is ringing."
  - This is indirect because the speaker wants someone to answer the phone but doesn't ask them to.

Uses of Utterances

- Some utterances are used not just to state something but to do things. These statements imply additional meanings:
  - I apologize.
  - I christen this ship "Victoria".
  - I object to your proposal.
  - I declare the meeting open.