

Pragmatics

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October 30, 2025

Fall 2025 FSEM CORE S119: Language as Human Nature
Colgate University

1. What is pragmatics?
2. Speech Acts – what we do
3. Conversational Implicatures – what we mean
4. Presuppositions – what we assume

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- There is a fuzzy boundary between semantics and pragmatics. By looking at some things people study with pragmatics (e.g., speech acts, conversational implicatures), I hope you can start to develop a sense of what the distinction is getting at

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 1. Direct speech acts
 2. Indirect speech acts

Direct Speech Acts

- There are three basic types of direct speech acts
- Each has their own special syntactic construction in most of the world's languages (below are examples in English and French)

Direct Speech Acts

Speech Act	Sentence Type	Function
Assertion	Declarative	conveys (true or false) information
Examples:	I love cats	J'aime les chats
Question	Interrogative	elicits information
Examples:	Do I love cats?	Est-ce que j'aime les chats?
Orders/Requests	Imperative	cause others to do something
Examples:	Love cats!	Aimez les chats!

- Assertion, question, and orders are mostly universal
- There are other speech acts which don't ever have a separate syntactic construction
 1. If you hurt my cat, I'll kill you! (threat)
 2. If you eat your broccoli, I'll give you a cookie. (promise)
 3. If you drop a ball from a building, it falls to the ground (cause and effect)

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 - (B): #Yes!
 - (B): [Points up the hill]

Indirect Speech Acts

- There are different ways of expressing the same basic speech act, without using the core options
- Direct Question: *Did Jessica get an A on the midterm?*
 - I'd like to know if Jessica got an A on the midterm
 - I'm curious to know if Jessica got an A on the midterm
 - ...

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- I order you to close the window
- I declare you are unfit for trial

- **Performative verbs** (like attest, order, declare, promise)
permit direct speech acts that impact the world
 - I now pronounce you husband and wife
 - I name this ship Chomsky
 - I dub thee Sir Noam

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Practice

1. Give a direct and indirect example of a question
2. Give a direct and indirect example of a request
3. Use herby to show one case where *name* is used performatively and one case where it is not

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- B: The band produced a series of sounds corresponding closely to the track of a song on the radio .
 - What is being implied here?

Conversational Implicatures

- Conversational partners, in normal circumstances, are aiming for a common propose or direction in their conversation
- As contributions are added, participants can judge the contribution as 'suitable' or 'unsuitable' in achieving their shared goals
- Paul Grice (a philosopher of language) laid out this point in the **Cooperative Principle**
 - Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the conversation you are involved in (i.e., play along and play nice)

- Grice proposed four principles that follow from being cooperative (each called a maxim)
 1. **Maxim of Quantity**
 2. **Maxim of Quality**
 3. **Maxim of Relation** (or Relevance)
 4. **Maxim of Manner**

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- If you don't violate the maxims, we learn about a speaker and what a speaker believes to be the goals of a conversation based on their responses
- If you violate the maxims, you can communicate more than what you are literally saying

Implicatures

- When addressees infer a meaning not literally said in a conversation, we call those meanings **implicatures**
- There are two types of implicatures, from two different sources:
 1. **Standard Implicatures**: inferred from the logic that the speaker is following the maxims
 2. **Non-standard Implicatures** (or **Conversational Implicatures**): inferred from the logic that the speaker is **flouting**, or intentionally not following, the maxim

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 - The writer must have intended to violate this, so they are trying to convey this is all they are able to say about the student, meaning they don't have positive things to say.

- A: Where does C live?
B: Somewhere in the South of France.

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B: Somewhere in the South of France.
- A: Tehran's in Turkey, isn't it, teacher?
B: And London's in Armenia, I suppose

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- A: Can you tell me the time?
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- A: Mrs. X is an old bag.
B: The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?

- A: Bob went to the store. He bought some cheese.

- A: Bob went to the store. He bought some cheese.
- A: Is Bob beautiful?
B: Well, Bob is so nice. He tries so hard at work. He's great with kids. He supports his parents. He loves his community.

- Give an example of flouting Quantity
- Give an example of flouting Quality
- Give an example of flouting Relevance
- Give an example of flouting Manner

Presuppositions

- A **presupposition** is (a) backgrounded and (b) taken for granted, i.e., assumed by the speaker to be already assumed by the hearer to be true.
- A test:
 - A proposition, p , is in the background of the sentence S , if p is implied by all of the sentences in the “ S family” (to borrow Barbra Partee’s framing)
 - S
 - It is not the case that S
 - Is it the case that S ?
 - If S then S'

An Example Test for Backgroundness

- Joan has stopped drinking wine for breakfast.
- →Joan used to drink wine for breakfast
 - It is not the case that Joan has stopped drinking wine for breakfast
 - Is it the case that Joan stopped drinking wine for breakfast?
 - If Joan stopped drinking wine for breakfast, then AA really works.

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 - Claire continued to smoke

- Give an example of a presupposition and provide a test that its backgrounded
- Demonstrate with the background tests that implicatures are not presuppositions