6 Pragmatics

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Pragmatics the study of language use in interpersonal communication. It is concerned with the choices made by speakers and the options and constraints which apply in social interaction. It examines the effects of language use on participants in acts of communication. Pragmatics is closely related to semantics, the study of meaning, with which it is often associated. For this reason the current chapter follows that on semantics.

Just as semantics covers a range of levels – grammar, syntax and the lexicon – so pragmatics is spread across a number of fields within linguistics and interfaces most clearly with semantics and sociolinguistics. The boundaries cannot, however, be always clearly defined. Depending on the type of emphasis one places in the field of pragmatics at least three subgroups can be recognised.

Pragmalinguistics deals with the more linguistic end of the pragmatic spectrum. Usage is seen from the view point of the structural resources of a language, i.e. it concerns aspects of context which are formally encoded in the structure of a language. These would be part of a user’s pragmatic competence (compare this with competence in syntax).

Sociopragmatics would see usage as primarily determined by social factors in communication.

Applied pragmatics refers to practical problems of interaction in situations where successful communication is critical, e.g. medical interviews, law courts, interrogations, official counselling.

One should also mention that there is a philosophical type of pragmatics, as developed in the late 19th century by American philosophers such as William
James and Charles Peirce and which is a precursor to linguistic pragmatics. There are typical themes which one finds treated in discussions of pragmatics. These are dealt with in the following parts of the present section.

6.1 Speech acts

A speech act is an utterance spoken in an actual communication situation. The notion stems from the British philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960) who worked in Oxford and elaborated his ideas in a series of lectures given shortly before his death and published in 1962 as *How to do things with words*. Austin was a representative of the school of ordinary language philosophy and maintained that one of the chief functions of language was to carry out socially significant actions. This explains his concern with language in use.

Speech acts are realised certain verbs and attempts have been made to classify these according to type of speech act. Austin begins his treatment by introducing a distinction between *constative* and *performative* verbs. The former are those which describe reality, e.g. *rain* in *It rained heavily all through the week-end*. Such sentences have a truth value as they can be evaluated as true or false. Performative verbs are quite different. They are instrumental in achieving an interactional goal between two or more speakers. A typical example would be the verb *promise* which realises a purely linguistic act. In the sentence *I promise to help you with the work* no work is done but the sincere intention to do so in the near future is expressed by the speaker.

**FELICITY CONDITIONS** A closer look at different types of speech acts reveals that the success of the act is dependent on a number of extra-linguistic conditions. For instance, the act of baptising can only be performed by someone who is entitled to do this by virtue of an ecclesiastical office. A priest can baptise a child or the wife of a mayor can baptise a ship if there is agreement that she is the person to do this. Furthermore, such actions have generally a ritual structure: there are special phrases involved and they must be spoken correctly and completely, otherwise the speech acts misfires.

Apart from such ritualised acts there are many which require conforming to knowledge about how they are performed and what is necessary for them to succeed. If you attempt to insult someone and they laugh at you, then the perlocutionary act (the effect of the insult, see below) is unsuccessful. If on going into a restaurant you ask your companion which of the two of you is going to cook then this utterance is infelicitous inasmuch as it is not a successful piece of communication.

6.2 Types of speech acts
Speech acts can be classified and subclassified. The first division leads to a triad of basic types one of which applies to all possible utterances.

1) **LOCUTIONARY ACTS** These express sense or reference as in *A cow is an animal* or *The earth is round*.

2) **ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS** Here the intentions of the speaker are expressed by using a performative verb such as *I baptise this ship ‘The Spirit of Galway’*.

3) **PERLOCUTIONARY ACTS** With this type the effect of the linguistic action is central. Perlocutionary acts include those which have a visible effect on the speaker, such as insulting or persuading someone.

The second and third type above are concerned with intention and effect and are thus the more prototypical type of speech acts. Depending on the precise action which is performed one can reach further subdivisions as shown in the following brief list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commanding,</td>
<td><em>Do your homework! Can I offer you a drink?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>requesting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>promising</td>
<td><em>I promise to come in time this evening.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologising</td>
<td><em>She’s sorry about the trouble her remarks caused.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asserting</td>
<td><em>I maintain that he is guilty.</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS** A frequent situation in language use is where the literal meaning of a sentence is not that which the speaker wishes the hearer to use in his/her interpretation. A simple example illustrates this. The sentence *It’s very draughty in here* is not normally intended as a simple statement but as an indirect request to close a window or door in a room. For reasons of politeness (see below) speakers may choose this indirect method of realising a directive speech act. Such acts leave the addressee the option of not complying with the implied request without losing face.

6.2.1 **Further developments**

The American philosopher John R. Searle expanded Austin’s ideas in a significant publication, *Speech Acts* (1969), in which he stressed the necessity of relating the function of signs and expressions to the social context in which they occur. The development of speech act theory has led to a split in philosophical semantics into truth-based semantics (involving constatives) and speech-act semantics (involving performatives). The distinction can be seen as that between meaning in communication as opposed to meaning in language, hence the assignment of the former to the field of pragmatics.
6.3 Conversational implicatures

The English philosopher H. Paul Grice (1913-1988) was concerned with the task of accounting for how human beings behave in normal conversation. To this end he introduced the notion of ‘conversational implicatures’ which are implications deduced by speakers during conversations. In order to be successful in deducing the intended meanings of one’s interlocutors the latter must abide by certain maxims of conversation. Grice recognises four main maxims of conversation

MAXIMS OF CONVERSATION

Quality What you say is assumed to be true
Quantity Be informative but not too much so
Relevance Be relevant to the purpose of the exchange
Manner Be perspicuous, avoid absurdity and ambiguity

Grice furthermore assumes that speakers keep to the cooperative principle. This is an unspoken agreement between speakers in conversation to follow the maxims of conversation, to interpret sensibly what is said by one’s interlocutor and in general to abide by the conventions of linguistic interaction in conversation. Occasionally, the maxims may be flouted for deliberate effect, for instance when one is being ironical or sarcastic or indeed when lying.

A further development of the conversational implicatures of Grice is what is termed relevance theory. The linguists Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson applied the notion of relevance to the structuring of conversation and maintain that a contribution is relevant if the effort required to process it is small, i.e. if it matches the context and concurs with the assumptions of the addressee.

6.4 Politeness

In general politeness is an aspect of a speaker’s social behaviour which shows deference towards the wishes and concerns of the addressee. There is a linguistic manifestation of politeness, investigated seminally in a book by the English linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1979), which involves strategies for maximising deference in exchanges, e.g. by employing indirect speech acts or by using formal address terms. These strategies aim at a certain goal, to save the face of the addressee. The term face refers to the public self-image of speakers and can be subdivided into two main types. Positive face refers to an individual’s wish to be respected and appreciated by others. Negative face refers to the wish not to be restricted or impeded in the choices
one makes concerning social behaviour. Politeness is hence understood as a means of showing awareness of another’s face. Social behaviour can constitute *face saving acts* by being deferential to others, emphasizing the importance of their wishes and concerns. On the contrary a *face threatening act* tends to encroach on another’s freedom of action and may be interpreted as an imposition or indeed an insult. There are many linguistic strategies for minimising the threat to negative face, for instance by apologizing in advance for disturbing someone, and for maximising the enhancement of positive face, for instance by pointing out a common interest in some suggestion made to an addressee.

Languages provides devices or strategies for reducing the potential loss of face in social interactions. For instance, *hedges* are devices, used in conversation, which serve the purpose of weakening the force of a statement, e.g. *He is perhaps the culprit after all. Could you possibly give me a hand? He’s not up to scratch, I suppose. She won’t leave us, will she?*

The face of one’s interlocutor can be supported in conversation by *back-channelling*, a strategy in communication whereby the listener confirms his/her attention to what the other person is saying (see section ??? below).

There are significant differences between language in terms of what is regarded as polite or impolite. For example, a simple but often important difference between English and German is that the latter allows the neutral use of third person pronouns when referring to someone who is present. If, say, more than two people are in a conversation in English then it is good manners when two are talking to each other and referring to someone else in the conversation to use the name of this individual, e.g. *Well, as George was saying, we could always come back early.* In German it would be entirely acceptable to say *Naja, wie er sagte, wir können auch früher zurückkomen* where *er* = ‘he’ is used for George, even if he is standing beside the people talking and listening to what they are saying.

### 6.5 Terms of address

The major European languages use different personal pronouns depending on the degree of acquaintance which speakers have with those they address. The systems found in Europe show a twofold distinction: one form for addressing acquaintances, friends and relatives and one for addressing strangers or more distant acquaintances. The formal means for realising this distinction vary from case to case. Each language uses the second person singular for informal address but there are a variety of ways for expressing formality pronominally as can be seen from the following table.
**Pronominal distinctions according to formality in selected languages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Formal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>tu</td>
<td>vous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian</td>
<td>tu</td>
<td>lei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>tu</td>
<td>usted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>ty</td>
<td>vy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>Du</td>
<td>Sie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the differences in realisations, it is practice in linguistic discussions to refer to the informal marker as the T form and the formal one as the V form (corresponding to the first letters of the French and Russian pronouns). Such systems are termed *dyadic* as they have two possible pronouns for addressing individuals.

In those languages with the above distinction the higher levels of society tend to use V-forms more and the lower levels the T-forms. This fact may be a remnant of the historical situation out of which the pronominal distinction arose.

### 6.5.1 The development of pronominal systems

The use of a plural of respect is commonly assumed to reach back to Latin and anecdotally to Julius Caesar. What is true is that the plural came to be used for addressing a single individual and so documents the encoding of social distance in language use. This distinction was picked up by vernacular European languages by the early Middle Ages, in German, for example, the earliest record of *ihr* ‘you-PL’ with singular reference goes back as far as the ninth century. Well into the early modern period this remained the only deferential pronoun of address. Its use was regulated by social status in the feudal system and later by class affiliation. By the end of the sixteenth century the third person singular – *er* ‘he’ or *sie* ‘she’ – appears as an indirect address form indicating deference.

The forms from different languages in the above table have various sources. For instance, the third person singular feminine in Italian *lei* ‘she’ refers originally to *maiestà* ‘majesty’. The German use of *Sie* ‘she-SG’ with plural verb forms is attested and would appear to be a combination of indirect third person address and respectful plural as augmented deference. In French and Russian the *vous* and *vy*, both ‘you-PL’ respectively, attained a double function: as a reference to more than one individual with whom one is on informal terms and as a form for more distant acquaintances and strangers which could be used in the singular or plural.

### 6.5.2 Present-day systems

The factors which determine the use of T versus V forms vary across languages,
both in history and at present. By and large today’s European languages have an absolute system where a given form is used for a certain individual and maintained until a possible switch is made. Switches are generally irreversible, indeed the only normal switch is from V to T with the important exception of teenagers becoming adults and experiencing the shift of T to V on the part of adults who address them.

Another orientation of the address system is conceivable. This would be where speakers decide from the actual speech context in which they find themselves what form of address to use. Such systems tend to be unstable over time because of the flux and uncertainty which they generate. The dyadic address system of English did not survive and this may be because it was not absolute. In the early modern period thou (the original T form) and you (the original V form) could be used for one and the same person, depending on the situation.

Address systems serve the function of giving linguistic expression to fairly stable aspects of social relationships, such as power, distance, solidarity or intimacy. But speakers often feel the desire to be more formal or less formal with certain individuals on certain occasions. If the direction the speakers wish to take is not congruent with the T/V form they use, a tension arises which cannot be resolved simply in absolute systems but which can be mitigated by the use of other features which congregate around the address pronouns, such as colloquial expressions, discourse elements which promote informality (or formality as the case may be).

Occasionally, a language may consciously abandon an established dyadic address system. This happened in the mid twentieth century in Sweden when the V form, ni ‘you-PL’, came to be replaced entirely by du ‘you-SG’ as the only pronoun of address, irrespective of degree of acquaintance. A similar situation applied, though to a lesser extent, in Norway and Denmark (but not in Finland). A slight swingback can be seen in Sweden where some young people think it fashionable to address other individuals using the ni form.

Although the various address systems are formally different, their social functions show considerable similarities. In the following a brief consideration of the German address system is offered to show how forms of address are manipulated by speakers in socially varied situations.

6.5.3 The German address system

The general rule in German is that the formal Sie ‘you’ is used for strangers and the informal Du ‘you’ for friends and relatives. However, the matter is considerably more nuanced than this simple statement implies.

Social maturation and the use of T/V A system of address in a language is something which is learned consciously by children in their society. The rule always holds that children use the familiar form with each other and with their relatives. However, they must learn (by 5 or 6 at the latest) that there is a marked formal form which is to be used with strangers. As opposed to the
acquisition of other aspects of language (morphology, syntax, etc.) children require a fair degree of correction as they overgeneralise the T form (here: Du) to begin with. Because the T form is the original unmarked form, there is a general correlation between age and the use of the formal V form. The T form is used among peers up to their twenties (unless some professional situation forbids this or the parties in a conversation are complete strangers).

Non-reciprocal usage and the notion of power The practice of one partner using one form of address and the second another is dying out quite quickly in European languages. It used to be common where one member in a conversation enjoyed a position of greater social power and thus was entitled to use the T form whereas the other had to use the V form. Originally, this was the situation with the nobility. Occasionally, there may be professional relationships today which reflect a similar type of situation. For instance it is common in German for master craftsmen to say Du to their apprentices but not vice versa.

Politeness and the use of formal address From the original use of the Du form for social inferiors there developed a secondary usage as a sign of contempt. In this sense it can still be used today. However, this only works in those situations in which the person addressed has an inherent claim to be addressed with the Sie form, e.g. an older pupil in school, an inmate in a prison, a worker on a building site, etc. The application of the Du form is always felt to be indignifying by the other party as it demonstrates a lack of respect. The converse of this situation is that where people use the Sie form as a sign of politeness and mutual respect. This usage would seem to be confined to the middle classes, probably because with working classes politeness does not have such a high value as solidarity, indeed it is often regarded as being class disloyal, i.e. aspiring to a higher social class, to overuse the Sie form. In keeping with the fact that the Sie form occurs in socially stratified contexts, there is a greater occurrence of the Du form in rural as opposed to urban settings. Indeed languages which have an entirely rural population (such as Irish) may often not have any formal pronominal address at all.

Degrees of acquaintance and the T form There is a general rule in all languages which have a formal/informal distinction that at the level of greatest personal acquaintance, the reciprocal Du form is used. This holds for instance between siblings, husband and wife, lovers, etc. Formerly, the age difference could have outweighed this with children using the Sie form to their parents or at least to their parents-in-law, however this usage has completely died out. Because the Du form implies close acquaintance it can be used to force this. Very often such a move is taken by one partner in an exchange and frowned upon by the other. Speakers often resist attempts on the part of others to use Du so as to keep their social distance from them. Forcing the Du form on someone is regarded as bad social behaviour. Retention of the Sie form can often occur simply where individuals want to be on the safe side: stick to politeness and you cannot go wrong.

Solidarity and the T form A frequent function of the Du form is to
demonstrate solidarity, i.e. strong common interests, with another individual or group of individuals. In this environment the requirement of close acquaintance can be waived. This is evident in many groupings in society. For instance, there is a tradition that members of the social democratic party say Du to each other. Equally, if one deliberately engages in a special activity with other individuals then joining the group usually involves using the Du form, e.g. engaging in various forms of sports. The use of the Du form for reasons of solidarity probably has its origin in working class usage. For example among miners, road workers, hauliers, etc. reciprocal Du is ubiquitous.

Switching from the V to the T form In all languages with a distinction between a familiar and a formal form of address there is continual switching from the V to the T form. Indeed it is socially codified in many languages, e.g. in German there is a quaint ceremony of Bruderschaft trinken ‘to trink brotherhood’, which is optional. The same term and ceremony also exists in Polish. Once the Du form has been established it is impossible to return to the Sie form without insulting the other person.

In situations in which there is a disparity in a relationship it is always up to the social superior to take the initiative and propose the Du form. This is a residue of the original situation where the more powerful members always said Du to the less powerful.

6.5.4 The English address system

English is remarkable among the European languages in not having a distinction between personal pronouns used for strangers and non-strangers. Indeed English does not even have a distinction between a pronoun for the second person singular, when addressing one person, and another for the second person plural, when addressing more than one. Both these matters are related.

English used to have a distinction in pronouns for address (see section 3.8.2 Morphological change for the original distribution of forms). On the one hand, there was a singular form thou ‘you-SG’, which now only survives in a few rural regions in England and in religious usage. On the other hand there was a plural form ye ‘you-PL’ which survives in some conservative varieties of English such as Scottish and Irish English. The ye form was later replaced by you, the original accusative. The singular was used for familiar and the plural for polite address. However, the system did not establish itself, most likely because it was not absolute. In the early modern period – as attested, for instance, in Shakespeare’s Hamlet – one could say thou and you to one and the same person, depending on the situation. Hamlet appears to use thou to his mother when he is addressing her in this function and uses you when addressing her as queen. This situation contrasts clearly with that in all European languages which have maintained the pronominal address distinction. These languages use it exclusively: one either uses the T form with someone or the V form, one cannot use now one, now the other form.
A further feature of the early modern English address system is that the *thou* form was often perceived as contemptuous, at least in certain varieties of the language (though not in traditional rural usage). The net effect is that the *thou* – *you* distinction did not maintain its function of social differentiation and went into decline. By the 18th century it was gone entirely in the standard language.

### 6.6 Honorifics

T/V address systems such as those found in Europe are by no means the only cases where social relationships are given pronominal expression. Indeed there are many languages which have far more complicated systems. Where a language goes beyond a T/V configuration linguists speak of *honorifics*. These are morphological encoded elements which are used to express varying degrees of social deference. Languages in east and south-east Asia are well-known for having explicant honorific systems, e.g. Japanese, Korean, Thai.

To give an idea of just what such a system entails in terms of morphological choices, the personal pronouns in Thai are outlined below. The European languages discussed in the previous section only have differences for the second person, but for a language like Thai there are distinct forms for the first person as well. The third person shows less variation. The form *khow* is most common with a special feminine form *khun-nai* used when referring to married women. The third person is not always distinguished by gender and number, though the general form *khow* does have the combined form *phuak khow* as a polite form to refer to more than one individual.

#### First person singular forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>shan</em> (m + f)</td>
<td>for close friends / intimates; old to young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(strangers and family), young to old (family)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>phom</em> (m)</td>
<td>Thai to foreigners and vice versa; young to old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>di-shan</em> (f)</td>
<td>as <em>phom</em>, but used by females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>krathom</em> (m)</td>
<td>younger male to older person; commoner to nobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kha</em> (m + f)</td>
<td>peasants amongst each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kha-pha-chao</em> (m + f)</td>
<td>most formal level, both genders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Second person singular/plural forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>tai-thao</em></td>
<td>addressing someone in high office, nobility, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>than</em></td>
<td>particularly polite form; junior to boss, employee to customer, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>khun-naai</em></td>
<td>equivalent forms for addressing females, especially married women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>khun</em></td>
<td>general address pronoun for strangers, and for people of differing ages groups; also found between husband and wife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
theu used between siblings, friends; otherwise only where person addressed is considerably younger; otherwise offensive
phi equivalent form but without age difference implied with theu; increasingly used as a polite form for ‘you’
kae belittling form, implying inferiority of person addressed

There also exist specially pronouns used when speaking to Chinese who were born in Thailand: ah-check for men and ah-sim for women. When speaking to Chinese, Thais may use oua ‘I’ and lue ‘you’, but these forms can be construed as offensive and are not generally regarded as polite.

The distinction between the genders is important in Thai, not only for personal pronouns as seen above. There are certain forms which are used exclusively by men or by women. For instance cha, khrap is ‘yes’ (used by men) while cha, khah [short low tone] is ‘yes’ (used by women). Khrap is also a polite particle used at the end of sentences by men and khah by women, with a short high tone it renders the sentence a question.

The other parameter which is important in the Thai honorific system is age which is seen in the context of family relations. For example, loung ‘uncle’ and pa ‘aunt’ are common forms of address for people who are considerably older than the speaker. The form na is found for addressing female who are a little younger than one’s mother. This issue will be considered in detail in the section on kinship terms below, see ???.

6.7 Deixis

Very much in language is concerned with pointing or referring. This section of language is referred to as deixis from the Greek word meaning ‘display, reference’. Deixis (read: /deɪksɨs/, sometimes /dɛiksɨs/) occurs in various guises. An obvious form is that of pronominal reference where pronouns serve the function of referring to nouns which have already been introduced in the discourse. In a synthetic language like Irish the articles and pronouns serve to refer back to nouns mentioned in a previous sentence as in Cheannaigh mo athair capall agus cráin an seachtain seo caite. ‘My father bought a horse and a sow last week’. Bhí sí an-daor cathfídh mé a rá. ‘It (i.e. ‘the sow’) was very dear’. Personal pronouns form another group of elements which have a deictical function as in I suppose he has left by now where a male person must have been previously mentioned in the discourse otherwise the sentence is not interpretable.

There are two other major areas where deixis plays a central role. This is in the temporal sphere of language, just consider the many expressions in any language to express points in time: today, now, later, before, tomorrow. The tense system of a language, such as English with present, past, pluperfect, future and future perfect tenses, can be interpreted as fulfilling deictic functions along a time axis.
The second area is that of spatial deixis. Apart from the many prepositions and adverbs, such as up, down, over, under, across, underneath, English has a two-way system of demonstrative, or ‘pointing’, pronouns: one for objects/beings close to the speaker and one for those further away as in English this/that. There is also an archaic term for distant objects/beings which were nonetheless still in sight: yonder as in Yonder building is the town church. The use of demonstrative pronouns has been extended to express degrees of relevance where greater distance correlates with a decrease in urgency, consider the sentences This matter must be dealt with immediately. We can turn to that question later.

6.7.1 Location and existence

There is an essential relationship between space and time inasmuch as location presupposes existence. Consider sentences like There are biscuits in the cupboard and There are modern translations of his plays. Such sentences use locative expressions – introduced by There are... – to imply existence. Other languages document the interrelationship of the temporal and spatial axis in a similar manner. For instance, in Irish the word ann ‘in-it’ expressed existence as in Níl ach drochsheans ann, lit. ‘there is only a bad chance in-it’. The sentence means that only a slight chance exists. Such meanings arise from concluding that location somewhere automatically implies existence. The same is in German where the sentence Die Übersetzungen sind da can mean ‘the translations exist’, i.e. they have been made, or ‘the translations are there’ (da = ‘there’), e.g. they are in the office. The connection between space and time can be seen even more clearly in the word for ‘existence’ in German, Dasein, lit. ‘to be there’.

6.7.2 Anaphora

A further set of deictic elements can be found which have the function of referring back to something which has already been mentioned in the current discourse. These elements are known collectively as anaphora (from Greek ana ‘back’ and pherein ‘carry’) and usually have the forms of prepositions. It is a feature of discourse that we mentioned something or someone explicitly, i.e. by name, the first time it occurs, but that after that we refer to the person or thing using pronouns. Consider the following sentence: Fiona bought a new car recently but she is not satisfied with it. Here one can see that the elements which share a subscript letter are co-referential, i.e. Fiona & she and a new car & it. It is a fact that in most languages third person pronouns fulfil this anaphoric function of pointing back to someone/something already mentioned. The latter may be in a different sentence, indeed often is. Personal pronouns are not the only elements used for anaphoric purposes, frequently synonyms are found with this function, e.g. Fergal got cash for the building work and that way the old fox managed to escape tax where Fergal and the old fox are co-referential.
Such examples show that by using anaphora to reference what has been introduced earlier one can create cohesion in discourse and texts (see next section). In some cases there is a kind of zero-element anaphora. Consider the sentence *Fergal wants to propose to Fiona but doesn’t have the courage* in which the finite verb *doesn’t* is co-referential with *Fergal* and so points backwards. However, the subject of this verb is suppressed and so one can speak of a zero-element which nonetheless has an anaphoric function.

Occasionally, an element points forward in a text. Such elements are called *cataphora* and can be seen in a sentence like *Fiona didn’t see him until he came around the corner, but it was indeed her long lost cousin.*

6.8 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is an area of linguistics which is involved with the examination of stretches of language which are larger than single sentences. Such stretches usually form a unit which is defined by the topic of discourse, e.g. a conversation about a football match, cracking a joke, a political interview or a lecture on historical linguistics.

A discourse with a recognisable structure can be analysed on two levels. The first is the semantic one and the term used to refer to whether a discourse make sense or not is *coherence*. Successful discourse depends largely on hearers recognising the context in which it takes place, i.e. what the so-called universe of discourse is. This leads to a restriction of the expected themes and hence makes the comprehension of the discourse a lot simpler. Furthermore, humans have encyclopedic knowledge about the world they live in and can draw on that to achieve the necessary level of contextualisation when interpreting a discourse. Incidentally, computers do not have such knowledge which makes automatic translation such an unreliable business.

The second level is the formal one. The main issue here is: how does one string together sentences? If this is done successfully then the discourse shows *cohesion*. There are various means to establish sentence connectivity: by the use of intersentential links in which anaphoric elements play a central role (see previous section).

6.8.1 Back-channeling and turn-taking

Discourse involves at least two individuals so the hearer or hearers can influence the discourse when someone is speaking. One important role which the hearer has is to offer feedback to the speaker. This is term *back-channelling*, communication by the listener to the speaker. Typically this would involve such elements as supportive noises, uttering short phrases like *yes; I see; of course; right; sure; indeed*. Back channelling is important for successful conversation as it encourages the speaker to continue. Even negative back channelling, e.g. *I*
don’t think so; I’m not so sure; hmm, maybe not can have this effect of support. The total lack of back channelling is often regarded by English speakers as disconcerting, especially in situations in which there is no eye contact, e.g. on the telephone. Cultures differ in this respect, e.g. Finns engage in much less back-channeling than, say Italians.

This issue is closely linked to the attitude towards silence in different societies and cultures. In some cases, silence is taken as dissatisfaction with the discourse and is avoided, e.g. among speakers of Irish English. Other societies, such as Finland, do not interpret silence in this way and so much more of it is found in personal contacts. If one looks further afield one can find communities, e.g. among some native Americans, where long periods of silence occur quite regularly, especially at the beginning of a social contact.

It is normal in discourse for the speaker to change throughout. The manner in which this change is affected varies across countries and cultures. Some allow a fair degree of overlap, with the person who wishes to speak pushing his/her way forward by talking more loudly, sometimes, but by no means always, showing that he/she does not want the present speaker to continue, e.g. with expressions like Well whatever, Be that as it may. In Irish English overlap of this kind is very common and not interpreted negatively. Other varieties of English and other languages see such behaviour as impolite.

Even if the discourse remains with one speaker, he/she may wish to change the topic of conversation. This is technically known as turn-taking. A turn is an event during a conversation when a change in topic is made. There are various mechanisms for doing this, usually by signalling the change to the hearer, e.g. Oh by the way, I saw Fiona in town yesterday. On the subject of cars, I had to bring mine to the garage last week.

6.8.2 Highlighting in sentences

Much of what occurs in discourse not only conveys information in a matter-of-fact manner but also places some kind of emphasis on certain aspects of the bundle of information. This is technically known as topicalisation.

Languages differ in the means which they use to convey what is new and what is given information in an utterance. For instance, Irish tends to use syntactic methods whereby the stressed element is brought to the beginning of the sentence. Technically this syntactic device is known as clefting which basically involves the positioning of the element to be stressed in a main clause with a form of be in the third personal singular neuter and the rest of the non-clefted sentence in a subsequent subordinate clause.

*Is i gCorcaigh a bhfuil sé ina chónaí faoi láthair.*
‘It is in Cork that he is living at present.’

*S’í a bhean chéile a rachaidh mé san ollscoil.*
‘It is his wife that I saw at the college.’
The grammaticality of clefting varies greatly within the varieties of present-day English (intonation – a rise in the tone of voice – is normally used for topcalisation purposes). In more standard forms only subjects and objects can undergo clefting. But in Scottish and Irish English, so-called ‘Celtic’ varieties, many elements can be the object of clefting, e.g. a prepositional phrase as in: It’s to Glasgow she went yesterday.

A sub-type of cleft sentences occurs when a single-clause is broken up into two clauses in which the topicalised element is brought to the front of the entire sentence. Such instances are termed pseudo-cleft sentences.

They’re no good. \(\rightarrow\) No good is what they are.
He bought a bicycle \(\rightarrow\) What he bought was a bicycle.

Summary

• Pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of usage. It has various sub-forms depending on the emphasis given by linguists, for instance it can be investigated from a strictly linguistic stance or with regard to social factors.

• Presupposition means that something is taken for granted in a sentence whereas entailment implies that some other fact(s) apart from that stated in the sentence also hold(s).

• In the analysis of conversation various implicatures – ‘rules’ if you like – are taken to apply. They refer to the quality, quantity, relevance and manner of conversation and are assumed to be almost universally valid.

• A speech act is a classifiable and structured utterance spoken in an actual communication situation. There are preconditions for speech acts such as felicity conditions which must be met for a speech act to be successful.

• Speech acts are classified according to their effect. Locutionary acts simple express sense or reference. Illocutionary acts express the intentions of the speaker whereas for perlocutionary acts the effect is of greatest importance. There are further subdivisions in type such as directives (commands for example) or commissives (promises for instance). An indirect speech act is one where the intended meaning of a sentence is different from the literal one.

• Deixis concerns the various types of pointing which is possible with language. This can be direct, with adverbs of direction, or indirect, for instance with different types of pronoun.

• Discourse analysis is concerned with the analysis of spoken language in sections larger than the sentence. The two main features for successful
discourse are coherence (based on semantic transparency) and cohesion (achieved through formal mechanisms such as sentence connectors and anaphoric elements).

- Emphasising sentence elements is achieved mainly through topicalisation (movement of highlighted elements, normally to the beginning of a sentence) and clefting (moving an element to the beginning by placing it in a dummy sentence with the rest in a subordinate clause).

Further reading