

# Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics

## Lecture No. 2

### Study Material

#### Definition of Semantics and Pragmatics

##### What is Semantics?

- The study of meaning communicated through language (Saeed, 1997).
- Semantics is the part of linguistics that is concerned with meaning (Löbner, 2002).
- It is the study of literal, de-contextualized, grammatical meaning (Frawley, 1992).
- Linguistic semantics is the study of how languages organize and express meanings (Kreidler, 1998).
- Language uses a system of linguistic signs, each of which is a combination of meaning and phonological and/or orthographic forms.
- According to Yule, Semantics is the study of the meaning of words, phrases and sentences.
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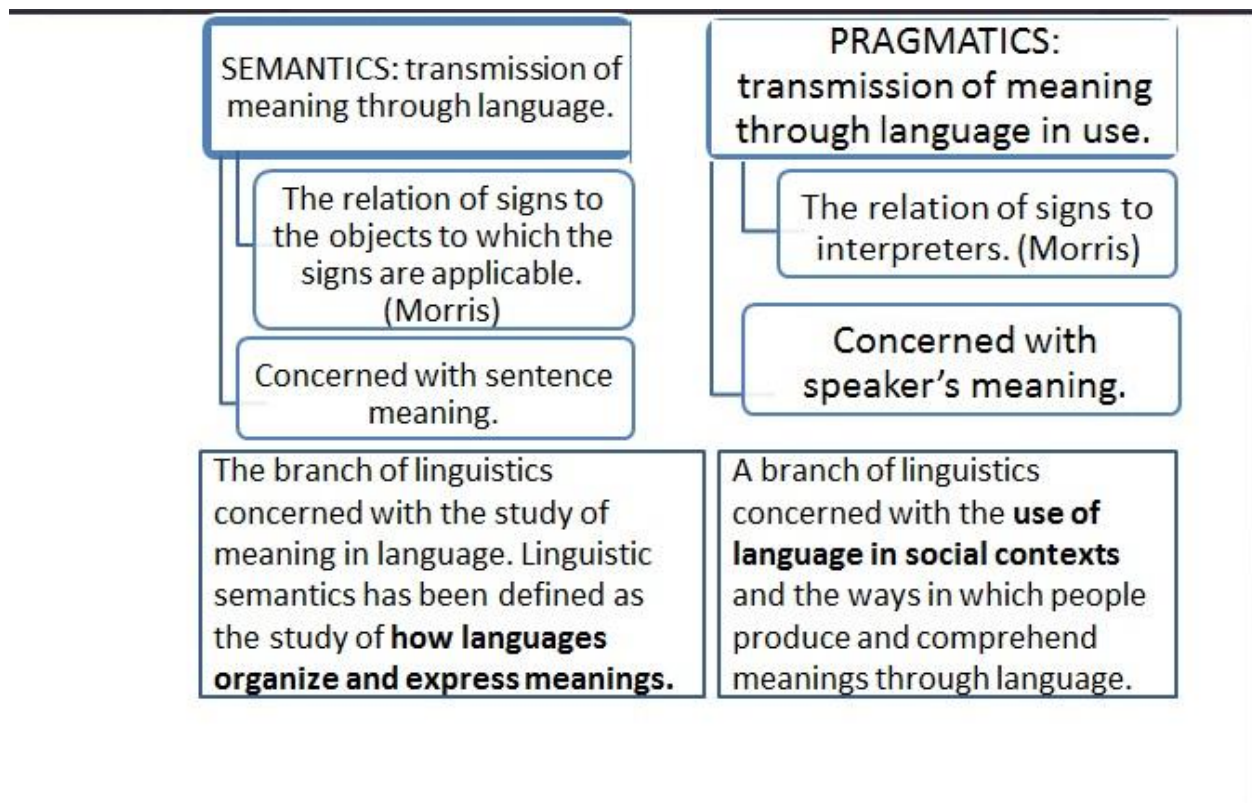
##### What is Pragmatics?

- “The study of meaning as communicated by the speaker and interpreted by the listener”.
- ‘The study of “invisible” meaning, or how we recognize what is meant even when it isn’t actually said or written’ (Yule, 2010).
- This includes background knowledge context i.e. people know about each other and the world.
- People have a shared understanding of how they should co-operate in their communication. (Cooperative Principle)

- Pragmatics may vary from culture to culture.
- Relationship between the linguistic form and communicative function is of central interest in “Pragmatics”.
- Pragmatics allow humans into the analysis of meaning.
- One can talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, purposes, goals and kinds of actions (e.g. requests, complaints etc.).

Example:

- ‘The bus was late’ (Complaint, Explanation)
- ‘My car broke yesterday



### The Borderline between Semantics and Pragmatics

- It is a disputed territory, and some issues that are placed on the interface by one theorist might be seen as entirely semantic or entirely pragmatic by others.
- Both semantics and pragmatics involve studying meaning, but they are generally seen as different fields.

- Semantics is the study of the contribution made to meaning by the means of linguistic items and the way that they are combined.
- Both words and sentences have semantics. E.g. ‘vixen’ means “female fox”, and ‘Yuki wa shiroi desu’ means “snow is white”.
- Lexical semantics deals with word meaning, and compositional semantics deals with the way that the meanings of lexical items combine to give phrase and sentence meaning.
- On this view of semantics, pragmatics takes up where semantics leaves off.
- Semantics is concerned with the meaning that a phrase has intrinsically.
- Whereas, pragmatics is concerned with what is conveyed by a particular utterance of a phrase, by a speaker, in a context.
- The borderline can be seen at the division between encoded and inferred aspects of meaning, between truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional aspects
- Between sentence meaning and speaker meaning.
- A recent overview of pragmatics has described ‘a radical literalist perspective, on which the semantics -pragmatics borderline should coincide with the borderline between saying and implementing (Sperber and Wilson, 2005).
- It is a very pervasive, and also an appealing, metaphor.
- It suggest semantics and pragmatics as two separate but neighboring countries, divided by a boundary that is identifiable but perhaps disputed, with each side laying claim to particular areas and may be with occasional readjustments taking place.
- The borderline is far from being settled or universally agreed.

### **Sentences and Utterances**

- Generally speaking, semantics is concerned with sentences and pragmatics is concerned with utterances (Chapman, 2011).
- Sentences are linguistic entities.
- There are semantic facts about any language - meanings of its words and the ways in which they can combine together to give meaning.
- An utterance - an instance of the production of a sentence or a fragment of a sentence.
- Sentences, by linguistic rules, can be ‘incomplete’ but people often do not talk in complete sentences.

- Meaningful utterances may be the production of incomplete sentence.
- That does not mean that they are incomplete as utterances (Chapman, 2011).
- The most obvious distinction between the sentence and utterance is that utterance will have spatio-temporal and physical properties, while the sentence does not.
- Sentences are abstract linguistic structures: do not have contexts.
- A related distinction, drawn from Noam Chomsky, between sentences and utterances is between 'grammaticality' or otherwise of a sentence and 'acceptability' or otherwise of an utterance.
- **For instance:** (1) Colorless green ideas sleep furiously.
- (2) Furiously sleep ideas green colorless.
- Both examples seem 'equally nonsensical' but can be recognized that (1) is a grammatical sentence of English and (2) is not a grammatical sentence (Chomsky 1957:15).
- Chomsky presents example (1) without any indication of context, safe in the knowledge that people will judge it to be unacceptable in any conceivable context in which it might be uttered.

### **Language and Logic**

- Logic is concerned with ways in which ideas relate to each other, can be combined together and can be used to derive other ideas with confidence.
- Many mid- twentieth century philosophers of language saw logic as the best possible system for explaining how meaning works in language.
- Logicians tend not to talk about 'ideas' though; the basic unit of traditional logic is the 'proposition'; a significant term in the discussions of meanings.
- Propositions are the meanings that are expressed by declarative sentences; can be the contents of thoughts.
- Consider the following examples of simple propositions:
  - 1) Philip is a father.
  - 2) Minar - e- Pakistan is situated in Lahore.
  - 3) Harold lives in Barcelona.

- In logic, symbols or ‘logical variables’ are used for the propositions, typically  $p$ ,  $q$ ,  $r$ , instead of individual actual sentences.
- Moreover, the symbol ( $\wedge$ ) is used for logical conjunction indicating complex proposition.
- For instance, combine sentence (1) and (3) to express:
- (4) Philip is a father and Harold lives in Barcelona.
- In logical notation, (4) is expressed as  $p \wedge q$ .
- It also specifies the truth and falsity of the complex proposition.
- Thus, if (1) and (3) are both true then their conjunction, (4), must also be true and vice versa.
- The logical meaning of simple propositions is determined by the principle of compositionality.
- Compositionality holds that the meaning of a whole is made up by combining together the meaning of its parts.
- Thus, the meaning of proposition is composed of meaning of subject plus meaning of the predicate.
- In order to find out that a particular proposition is true, it is also important to talk about the relationships between different propositions.
- Imagine that you discover that (5) is true:
- (5) Philip has a son.
- Keeping this in view, you can be confident that (1) is also true, since being a father follows (for man) from having a son.

### **The Explicit and the Implicit**

- Pragmatists are interested in cases where what the speaker intends to convey is different from what the words one chooses literally mean.
- The former is generally known as the implicit meaning and the latter as the explicit meaning.
- Both implicit and explicit meanings are different.
- This suggests that there are some ‘pragmatic principles’ that are shared by the speakers and the hearers.

- Pragmatists are interested to determine the nature and extent of these principles and to answer a question that why speakers rely so much on implicit meaning.
- One answer is undoubtedly that implicit meaning makes conversational exchanges more interesting.
- Lets consider an example:
- [*John, who has been working all day, is observed still working late at night*]

John is a machine.

- In this example, our knowledge about the nature of people and of machines lead us to understand that the truth-conditions do not adequately account for what they are being used in the context to convey.
- The intention is to draw attention to some striking similarities, but not an exact identity, between John and a machine.
- Where there is a difference between implicit and explicit meaning, the implicit meaning conveys a lot more than what is literally expressed
- Literal meaning ‘underdetermines’ the meaning conveyed.
- To Stephen Levinson, ‘the need to articulate spoken language in order to communicate creates an encoding bottleneck.’
- The solution is to find out a way to carry meaning on the top of meaning (Levinson 2000:6).
- That is to communicate implicitly as well as explicitly.
- The distinction between explicit and implicit meaning are matters of great interest and controversy in present-day pragmatics.