

Meaning 1.2: Sentence meanings — relationships between propositions

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Where we left off: sentence meaning

We use language to reason about and convey information about the world at large. Recall the following:

(i) *Every student didn't pass the exam.*

. Nobody passed the exam

or

. Some people passed the exam, but not everybody.

(ii) *My firetruck broke down on my way to school today.*

. I have a firetruck.

(iii) *Can you pass me the salt?*

. I want you to pass me the salt.

Sentence meaning by inferential relations

Intuitively, the basic units of information exchanged are propositions, which can be true or false.

Utterances (most often we consider declarative sentences) then denote (a) proposition(s).

We can then start to evaluate the meaning of sentences by examining the relationship between the sentence and other propositions.

A sentence itself can be thought of as a proposition as well.

More of (i)

Some propositions follow by logic.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Janelle wrote a song. | SENTENCE |
| → There existed a song. | PROPOSITION IN QUESTION |
| • Stevie rolled the ball. | SENTENCE |
| → The ball moved. | PROPOSITION IN QUESTION |
| • Dogs are mammals. | SENTENCE |
| → Dogs are animals. | PROPOSITION IN QUESTION |

More of (ii)

Some propositions emerge from the context.

- Alicia: Did you like my dance?

Michael: I saw you spun around quite a bit.

SENTENCE

\rightsquigarrow M probably didn't like A's dance.

PROPOSITION IN QUESTION

- Michael swung at the ball.

SENTENCE

\rightsquigarrow Michael missed the ball.

PROPOSITION IN QUESTION

- Context: two people are in a money laundering scheme, and they previously agreed to mention 'chicken pot pie' if they ever thought their phone lines were being tapped.

I feel like having chicken pot pie tonight, Bert.

SENTENCE

\rightsquigarrow Our line may be tapped right now.

PROPOSITION IN QUESTION

More of (iii)

Some propositions are preconditions for an utterance to even have some sort of truth or falsity.

- Kendrick stopped dancing. SENTENCE
// Kendrick previously danced. PROPOSITION IN QUESTION
- Shakira's pet shark ate her goldfish. SENTENCE
// Sharkira has a pet shark. PROPOSITION IN QUESTION
- Anderson regretted moving in with his parents. SENTENCE
// Anderson lived/lives with his parents. PROPOSITION IN QUESTION

Inferential relationships

- (i) **Entailment**: Proposition A **entails** proposition B if the truth of A guarantees the truth of B .

Intuition: B is true when A uttered 'in a vacuum' — no context needed for B .

Notation: $A \rightarrow B$

- (ii) **Implicature**: Proposition A is an **implicature** proposition B if B is inferred from A given the context, but B is not necessarily true.

Intuition: A intends to mean B but context necessary for A to mean B .

Notation: $A \rightsquigarrow B$

- (iii) **Presupposition**: A proposition B is a **presupposition** of proposition of A if proposition B is a precondition on the truth / falsity of A

Intuition: A makes no sense without B — B establishes context.

Notation: $A // B$ (this notation is not standard)

Examples of each relation

(i) Janelle wrote a song.

→ There existed a song.

ENTAILMENT

(ii) I feel like having chicken pot pie tonight, Bert.

↗ Our line may be tapped right now.

IMPLICATURE

(iii) Shakira's pet shark ate her goldfish.

// Sharkira has a pet shark.

PRESUPPOSITION

Division of labor — context (in)dependence

The division of this meaning labor depends mostly on the extent to which the interaction of meaning with context is considered.

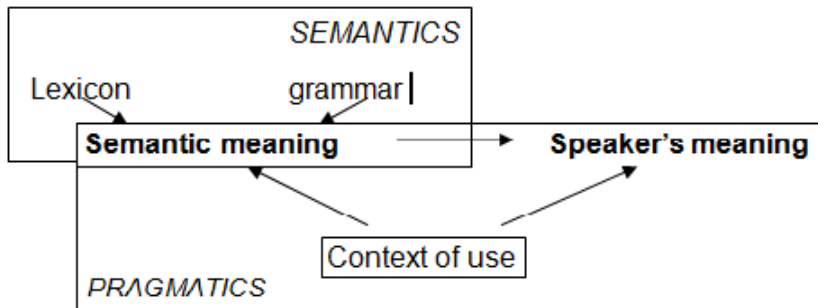
Semantics is concerned with the literal meaning of words, phrases and sentences. Interested in how to build/compose larger units of meaning from smaller units. Little to no context considered.

ENTAILMENT, PRESUPPOSITION

Pragmatics is concerned with meaning in context. How do we arrive at intended meaning? Sometimes this is systematic. All about context.

IMPLICATURE, PRESUPPOSITION

Semantics and Pragmatics



Finding that division

It would be nice to have tools for us to be able to systematically place propositions of any given utterance into either the semantics or pragmatics bin.

There are a few good tests for this. Next video.

End of this video's material.