

Semantics vs. pragmatics



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics which studies the ways in which context contributes to meaning. It encompasses speech act theory, conversational implicature talk in interaction and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology, linguistics and anthropology. pragmatics studies how the transmission of meaning depends not only on structural and linguistic knowledge (e. g., grammar, lexicon, etc.) of the speaker and listener, but also on the context of the utterance, any pre-existing knowledge about those involved, the inferred intent of the speaker, and other factors. In this respect, pragmatics explains how language users are able to overcome apparent ambiguity, since meaning relies on the manner, place, time etc. of an utterance. The ability to understand another speaker's intended meaning is called pragmatic competence.

Structural ambiguity:

The sentence “ You have a green light” is ambiguous. Without knowing the context, the identity of the speaker, and his or her intent, it is difficult to infer the meaning with confidence. For example: It could mean that you have green ambient lighting.

It could mean that you have a green light while driving your car. It could mean that you can go ahead with the project. It could mean that your body has a green glow. It could mean that you possess a light bulb that is tinted green. Similarly, the sentence “ Sherlock saw the man with binoculars” could mean that Sherlock observed the man by using binoculars, or it could mean that Sherlock observed a man who was holding binoculars. The meaning of the sentence depends on an understanding of the context and the speaker's

intent. As defined in linguistics, a sentence is an abstract entity — a string of words divorced from non-linguistic context — as opposed to an utterance, which is a concrete example of a speech act in a specific context.

The closer conscious subjects stick to common words, idioms, phrasings, and topics, the more easily others can surmise their meaning; the further they stray from common expressions and topics, the wider the variations in interpretations. This suggests that sentences do not have meaning intrinsically; there is not a meaning associated with a sentence or word, they can only symbolically represent an idea. The cat sat on the mat is a sentence in English; if you say to your sister on Tuesday afternoon, “ The cat sat on the mat,” this is an example of an utterance.

Thus, there is no such thing as a sentence, term, expression or word symbolically representing a single true meaning; it is underspecified (which cat sat on which mat?) and potentially ambiguous. The meaning of an utterance, on the other hand, is inferred based on linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the non-linguistic context of the utterance (which may or may not be sufficient to resolve ambiguity). In mathematics with Berry’s paradox there arose a systematic ambiguity with the word “ definable”. The ambiguity with words shows that the descriptive power of any human language is limited.

Etymology

The word pragmatics derives via Latin *pragmaticus* from the Greek (*pragmatikos*), meaning amongst others “ fit for action”, [7] which comes

from (pragma), “ deed, act”, and that from (prassō), “ to pass over, to practice, to achieve”.

Areas of interest 1- The study of the speaker’s meaning, not focusing on the phonetic or grammatical form of an utterance, but instead on what the speaker’s intentions and beliefs are. 2- The study of the meaning in context, and the influence that a given context can have on the message. It requires knowledge of the speaker’s identities, and the place and time of the utterance. 3- Metapragmatics means to understand the context in which the speech event took place. Without the context, pure referential meanings elide the complexities of the any speech utterance. 4- The study of implicatures, i. e. the things that are communicated even though they are not explicitly expressed. 5- 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. 6- The study of what is not meant, as opposed to the intended meaning, i. e. that which is unsaid and unintended, or unintentional. 7- Information Structure, the study of how utterances are marked in order to efficiently manage the common ground of referred entities between speaker and hearer 8- Formal Pragmatics, the study of those aspects of meaning and use, for which context of use is an important factor, by using the methods and goals of formal semantics.

What is Semantics ?

Semantics (from Ancient Greek: sēmantikós) is the study of meaning. It focuses on the relation between signifiers, like words, phrases, signs, and symbols, and what they stand for, their denotation. Linguistic semantics is

the study of meaning that is used for understanding human expression through language. Other forms of semantics include the semantics of programming languages, formal logics, and semiotics. The word semantics itself denotes a range of ideas, from the popular to the highly technical. It is often used in ordinary language for denoting a problem of understanding that comes down to word selection or connotation. This problem of understanding has been the subject of many formal enquiries, over a long period of time, most notably in the field of formal semantics.

In linguistics, it is the study of interpretation of signs or symbols used in agents or communities within particular circumstances and contexts. Within this view, sounds, facial expressions, body language, and proxemics have semantic (meaningful) content, and each comprises several branches of study. In written language, things like paragraph structure and punctuation bear semantic content; other forms of language bear other semantic content. The formal study of semantics intersects with many other fields of inquiry, including lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, etymology and others, although semantics is a well-defined field in its own right, often with synthetic properties. In philosophy of language, semantics and reference are closely connected. Further related fields include philology, communication, and semiotics.

What are the differences between semantics and pragmatics ?

Learning the difference between semantic and pragmatic meaning can help new English language learners avoid miscommunication and misunderstandings. Learn about the difference between the two terms and

<https://assignbuster.com/semantics-vs-pragmatics/>

review examples of each. When learning the English language, understanding the differences between semantic and pragmatic meaning can be a valuable tool to maximize your linguistic ability. Although both are terms used in relation to the meanings of words, their usage is drastically different.

Semantics refers to the meaning of words in a language and the meaning within the sentence. Semantics considers the meaning of the sentence without the context. The field of semantics focuses on three basic things: “the relations of words to the objects denoted by them, the relations of words to the interpreters of them, and, in symbolic logic, the formal relations of signs to one another . Semantics is just the meaning that the grammar and vocabulary impart, it does not account for any implied meaning. In this sense, there’s a focus on the general ‘ rules’ of language usage.

On the other hand, Pragmatic meaning looks at the same words and grammar used semantically, except within context. In each situation, the various listeners in the conversation define the ultimate meaning of the words, based on other clues that lend subtext to the meaning. For example, if you were told to, “ Crack the window,” and the room was a little stuffy, and the speaker had just said prior to this that they were feeling a little warm, then you would know, pragmatically, that the speaker would like you to open the window a ‘ crack’ or just a little , If you were with a friend who was locked out of his home, and you were standing at a back door trying to get inside, your friend might say ‘ crack that window’ and literally mean to put a ‘ crack’ in the window, or break the window.