

Pragmatics, the cooperative principle, speech acts

A Definition of Pragmatics

- the study of the practical aspects of human action and thought.
- the study of the use of linguistic signs, words and sentences, in actual situations.

Pragmatics outlines the study of meaning in the interactional context

It looks beyond the literal meaning of an utterance and considers how meaning is constructed as well as focusing on implied meanings. It considers language as an instrument of interaction, what people mean when they use language and how we communicate and understand each other. Jenny Thomas says that pragmatics considers:

- the negotiation of meaning between speaker and listener.
- the context of the utterance.
- the meaning potential of an utterance.

What would happen to language if Pragmatics did not exist?

Pragmatics acts as the basis for all language interactions and contact. It is a key feature to the understanding of language and the responses that follow this. Therefore, without the function of Pragmatics, there would be very little understanding of intention and meaning. We would like to demonstrate this by showing you how life would be WITHOUT Pragmatics:

‘Can you pass the salt?’

Literal Meaning: Are you physically able to do this task?

Literal Response: ‘Yes’

(Pragmatic Meaning: Will you pass me the salt?

Pragmatic Response: pass the salt to the speaker.)

‘What time do you call this?’

Literal Meaning: What time is it?

Literal Response: A time (e.g. ‘twenty to one.’)

(Pragmatic Meaning: a different question entirely, e.g. Why are you so late?

Pragmatic Response: Explain the reason for being so late.

Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory considers language as a sort of action rather than a medium to convey and express. The contemporary Speech act theory developed by J. L. Austin a British philosopher of languages, he introduced this theory in 1975 in his well-known book of 'How do things with words'. Later John Searle brought the aspects of theory into much higher dimensions. This theory is often used in the field of philosophy of languages. Austin is the one who came up with the findings that people not only uses that language to assert things but also to do things. And people who followed him went to greater depths based on this point.

Cooperative principle

In conversation analysis, the cooperative principle is the assumption that participants in a conversation normally attempt to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear. The concept of the cooperative principle was introduced by philosopher H. Paul Grice in his article "Logic and Conversation" (Syntax and Semantics, 1975). In that article, Grice argued that "talk exchanges" aren't merely a "succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction."

Grice's Conversational Maxims

"[Paul] Grice fleshed out the **cooperative principle** in four conversational '[maxims](#),' which are commandments that people tacitly follow (or should follow) to further the conversation efficiently:

Quantity:

- Say no less than the conversation requires.
- Say no more than the conversation requires.

Quality:

- Don't say what you believe to be false.
- Don't say things for which you lack evidence.

Manner:

- Don't be obscure.
- Don't be ambiguous.
- Be brief.
- Be orderly.

Relevance:

- Be relevant.