Pragmatics (01:615:350)

Time: Mondays & Thursdays 11:30~12:50  
Location: Scott Hall 204, 43 College Avenue  
Course website: sakai.rutgers.edu  
Instructor: Prof. Yimei Xiang (yimei.xiang@rutgers.edu)  
Office: Dept of Linguistics (18 Seminary Place) #TBD  
Office hour: Wednesday 10:30~12:00 (with appointment!)

1 About this course

In daily conversations, what a sentence conveys can be much richer than its literal meaning. For example, the conjunctive sentence “Ede had too much coffee and couldn’t fall asleep last night” expresses not only a conjunction of two propositions (the literal meaning), but also a causality relation between these two propositions (the non-literal meaning), that it, having too much coffee made Ede unable to fall asleep last night. The non-literal aspect of meaning can either make communication more efficient, or cause bumps or potholes.

Pragmatics is a major branch of Linguistics devoted to understanding the non-literal aspect of meaning. It focuses on how the utterance context and conversational maxims affect the meaning of an utterance, as well as what an utterance attributes to the context. In this course, we will explore a range of theoretical and experimental studies in Pragmatics.

2 Course learning goals and objectives

- To become more aware of language usage in context (your own language and that of others)
- To understand the distinction between semantics and pragmatics and what is meant by each
- To learn about the application of symbolic systems (such as set theory and propositional logic) in modeling natural language meaning
- To learn about psycholinguistic and developmental experimentation in pragmatics
- For majors and minors: To add to your technical and conceptual repertoire in the field of Linguistics as you complete a (core) course as part of your major or minor.

3 Course requirements

There are four main course requirements.

- Class participation (10%)
  - Attendance: You are required to attend each class and be active in class. See “General Policies” for details about Attendance Policy.
  - Classroom etiquette: You are allowed to eat/drink as long as not creating a distraction. You must turn off your cellphone (or any other handheld device) Laptops can only be used for reasons directly related to class (e.g., note taking, checking digital copies of the reading) No surfing, social media, or texting.

- One at-home assignment (10%)
  There will be an at-home assignment on formal logic. This assignment will be distributed via Sakai on Sep 14 and due on Sep 19. You are allowed to form discussion groups to discuss the assignment, but the final answers that you submit must be in your own words. You will be asked to write out the name(s) of people who you collaborated with on the problem-sets.

- Readings and six reaction comments (30%)

There is no official textbook for this course. All readings will be downloadable from Sakai. Although you are not expected to finish all the readings, you shall read a substantial amount of materials to follow the lectures and write reaction comments. Each week you will be asked to report what you have read.

During Week 4-7 and Week 9-14 (see schedule), post one comment by Friday 11pm each week related to the readings or the lectures on the forum section of the course website. To get credit, a comment must have at least 150 words and must make substantive contributions to the discussions. You can formulate your comments using the following sample templates, or comment on issues raised by your classmates. At most one comment will receive credit per week. Your final scores will be calculated based on your best 6 comments (5% each) through the semester.

**Template 1: (for critical comments)**
- Part 1: What specific issue are you concerned about?
- Part 2: Choose one of the following options:
  - If this issue has been discussed by the readings, summarize the proposal from the readings and explain why this proposal is insufficient.
  - If this issue is not discussed in the readings, provide a new proposal and evidence for your proposal.
  - If it’s hard to address this issue, lay a seemingly feasible proposal and explain why it is insufficient.

**Template 2: (for constructive comments)**
- Part 1: What ideas/findings in the reading(s) are interesting to you?
- Part 2: What other facts can be explained by these ideas? How are these facts related to and different from the ones discussed in the reading(s)?

**Midterm exam (20%) and final exam (30%)**
We will have a midterm exam in-class in Week 8 and a final exam on the day and time designated by the University. See finalexams.rutgers.edu for the schedule of the final exam. In both exams, you are allowed to bring an one-page A4/letter-sized paper sheet of notes.

A (90-100), B+ (85-89.9), B (80-84.9), C+ (75-79.9), C (70-74.9), D (60-69.9), F (≤ 59.9)

4 General policies

The following policies are provided at ling.rutgers.edu > Academics > Undergraduate > Learning Goals and Policies (a direct link is here):

- Rutgers Code of Student Conduct
- Policy on Religiously Observant Students
- Students with Disabilities
- Attendance Policy
- Academic Integrity
- Complaints
- Sakai Policy
- Email and Contact Information Policy

It is the responsibility of all students to read and abide by the policies above.

5 Course website

This course has a website on Sakai (sakai.rutgers.edu) Log on using your NETID and password, and then look for the course in your active course tabs. If you encounter difficulty using Sakai, please contact their helpdesk.
6 Schedule

This plan is subject to change. See the course website for the most up-to-date version.

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<td>Experiments on presuppositions</td>
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Week 3: The class on Sep 17 (Monday) is cancelled and replaced with an at-home assignment on formal logic.

Week 12: Due to Thanksgiving, our normal Thursday class is scheduled on Nov 20 (Tuesday).

7 Course topics and readings

This reading list is subject to change. Readings marked with ‘*’ are optional. Most readings are taken from the following books:


* Week 1: Introduction
  (Issues: the division of labor between semantics and pragmatics)
  – Levinson (1983) [Chapter 1]

* Week 2-3: Set theory and first-order logic
  – Allwood et al. (1977) [Chapter 2 and 4]

* Week 4: Conversational implicatures
  (Issues: conversational implicatures, cooperation principle, Gricean maxims, cancellation test)
• **Week 5: Monotonicity and scalar implicatures**
  (Issues: monotonicity, scalar implicatures, inclusive/exclusive or, pragmatic approach vs lexical approach)
  
  – Horn, Larry. (2012). Implicature. [Focus on section 3]

• **Week 6: Basics of presuppositions**
  (Issues: common ground, presuppositions, presupposition triggers, projection test)
  
  – Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000) [Chapter 6: section 3]

• **Week 7: Problematic properties of presuppositions**
  (Issues: defeasibility, global/local accommodation of presuppositions, semantic vs. pragmatic theories of presupposition)
  
  – Levinson (1983) [Chapter 4: section 3 and 4]

• **Week 8: Midterm**
  No readings.

• **Week 9: Conventional implicatures**
  (Issues: indirect speech acts, illocutionary force, performative utterances)
  

• **Week 10: Speech acts and performatives**
  (Issues: indirect speech acts, illocutionary force, performative utterances)
  
  – Levinson (1983) [Chapter 5]
  – Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000) [Chapter 4: section 2 and section 4]

• **Week 11: Indexicals**
  
  – Levinson (1983) [Chapter 2]
• **Week 12: references and (in)definites**

(Issues: referential readings of definites and indefinites)

  - Heim, Irene. (1991) Articles and Definitness. [Section 1.3 and 2.2]
  - Chierchia & McConnell-Ginet (2000) [Chapter 6: section 2]

• **Week 13: Acquisition of implicatures**


• **Week 14: Experiments on presuppositions**


• **Week 15: Final review**

No readings.