8 Study Guide

Pragmatics: Inference for Language

Terminology
You should be able to simply define or explain the following terms and concepts.

Context
Cooperative Principle
Explicated inference
Explicature
Extralinguistic competence
Gricean Maxims
Inferences
Linguistic underdeterminacy
Logical entailments
Optimal Relevance
Particularized conversational implicatures
Principle of Relevance
Semanticization
Semantics/pragmatics division of labor

Important Points and Concepts

- Pragmatics is our ability to draw contextually plausible inferences.
- Linguistic utterances are under-determined; not all linguistic meaning results from the semantics.
- Pragmatic inferences play a critical role in giving coherence to stretches of discourse, thus making language work as a communicative system.
- Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle for producing cooperative coherent conversational discourse, based on four maxims: Quantity, Quality, Relation, Manner.
- For an utterance to be Relevant (in Sperber and Wilson's sense) there must be a sufficient number of contextual implications relative to the processing effort to draw them.
- The greater the number of contextual implications, the more Relevant the utterance.
- Semantic meaning, contextual assumptions, explicated inferences, and implicatures all contribute to the overall conveyed meaning of an utterance.
- Semanticization is a historical process whereby pragmatic inferences become reinterpreted as part of the semantics (linguistic meaning) of an expression.

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Skills
On completion of this chapter, you should be able to perform the following tasks:

- Determine contributions of different types of context to the overall conveyed meaning of an utterance
- Evaluate utterances for their adherence to, or deviation from, Gricean maxims
- Discuss the contributions to pragmatic theory made by Grice and by Sperber and Wilson
- Discuss differences between entailments, implicatures, and explicated inferences, and identify them in linguistic examples
- Define semanticization and provide examples when prompted

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