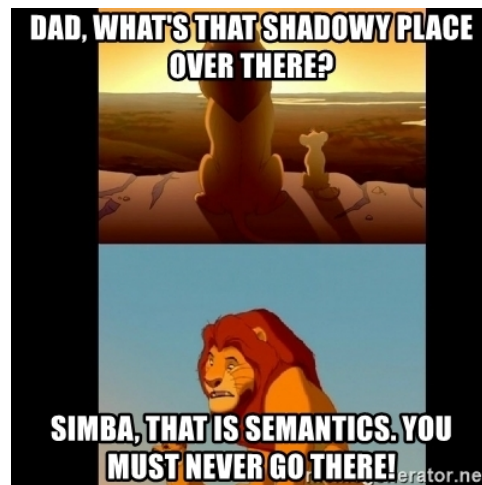


'So pick a bird,' the Water Genie commanded. 'Any bird.' This was puzzling. 'The only bird around here is a wooden peacock,' Haroun pointed out, reasonably enough. Iff gave a snort of disgust. 'A person may choose what he cannot see,' as if explaining something very obvious to a very foolish individual. 'A person may mention a bird's name even if the creature is not present and correct: crow, quail, hummingbird, bulbul, mynah, parrot, kite. A person may even select a flying creature of his own invention, for example winged horse, flying turtle, airborne whale, space serpent, aeromouse. To give a thing a name, a label, a handle; to rescue it from anonymity, to pluck it out of the Place of Namelessness, in short to identify it - well, that's a way of bringing the said thing into being. Or, in this case, the said bird or Imaginary Flying Organism.'

Haroun and the Sea of Stories, Salman Rushdie

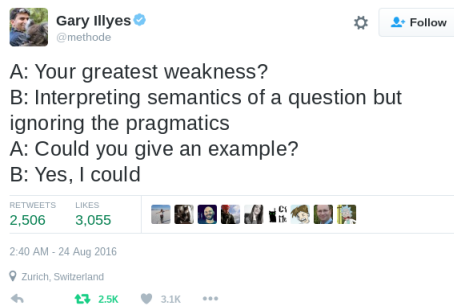
Semantics and Pragmatic ¹

SEMANTICS is the study of what linguistic expressions mean.



PRAGMATICS is the study of what speakers mean by them, i.e., what our utterances mean. In other words, it is the study of speakers' implicit knowledge about how to connect language with their real-world knowledge.

¹The content is mostly taken from the course slides of Ling101 Fall 2021 instructed by Dr. Yağmur Sağ.



There is no sharp distinction between semantics and pragmatics. But we can say that entailments fall under the scope of SEMANTICS while implicatures fall under the scope of PRAGMATICS.

Let's try to understand the difference by focusing on different inferences (or in other words, implications).

1 Inferences

Meaning seems to involve some form of 'understanding' and drawing INFERENCES seems to be a part of 'understanding'. Let's assume that we have the following scenario:

A: How many kids does Steve have?
B: Steve has two kids.

Now let's look at the possible inferences we get from B's answer.

- a. Steve has more than one kid.
- b. Steve has exactly two kids.

What is the main difference between these inferences? How can we distinguish those? We will focus on two different relations here: *Entailments and Implicatures*

1.1 Entailments

A sentence X ENTAILS a sentence Y if and only if there are no circumstances under which X is true but Y is not true.

- a. Leah painted a red cupboard.
- b. Leah painted a cupboard.

What is the relation between these sentences? $\rightarrow$ (a) entails (b).

Well, how can we understand this relation? $\rightarrow$ If I deny (b) right after saying (a), then I would contradict myself:

Leah painted a red cupboard but Leah did not paint a cupboard. (This is a contradiction)

This is called the DEFEASIBILITY TEST. In other words, entailments are NOT defeasible (In OTHER WORDS, they cannot be cancelled.)

Another important property of entailments is the following: Reinforcing an entailment will give rise to redundancy.

Leah painted a red cupboard and Leah painted a cupboard. (Second sentence is completely redundant)

Moreover, entailments have directions. If A entails B, it does not need to be the case that B also entails A.

Leah painted a cupboard, but Leah did not paint a red cupboard. (Not a contradiction)

We might also have mutual entailments. When an entailment pattern is bidirectional, i.e., A entails B and B entails A, then the propositions expressed by A and B are equivalent.

1.2 Implicatures

Y is an implicature of X iff Y is ‘conveyed’ by X, but ‘not Y’ is consistent with X.

- a. Nobita ate some of the cookies.
- b. Nobita did not eat all of the cookies.

Well, what is the difference between entailments and implicatures?

Implicatures are defeasible:

Nobita ate some of the cookies and **it is not the case that** Nobita did not eat all of the cookies.

Implicatures are reinforcing:

Nobita ate some of the cookies, in fact, Nobita did not eat all of the cookies. (No redundancy)

1.3 Grice’s Maxims of Conversation

H. P. Grice formulated the following conversational principles that guide conversational interactions of a speaker and an addressee.

MAXIM OF RELEVANCE: Be relevant to the situation at hand.

A: I’m finished with dating people who are the complete opposite of me.

B: *Carol is just like you.*

A: We were talking about my feelings about dating, and now B is describing Carol’s qualities. This seems to violate the maxim of relevance.

IMPLICATURE: B is telling me to consider dating Carol.

Let's look at another example:

(At dinner, I decide my food needs more seasoning. I look for the salt and pepper, notice it by you, and say to you...)

Can you pass the salt?

Robot: You are seeking information about my ability to pass salt.

Human: This is a violation of relevance ... what is the implicature I should draw?

IMPLICATURE: The speaker would like me to pass the salt.

MAXIM OF QUANTITY: Be informative. Do not give more or less (relevant) information than is required.

There are 4 eggs in the fridge.

This is too little information if there are 6 eggs in the fridge.

IMPLICATURE: No more than 4 eggs are in the fridge.

MAXIM OF MANNER: Be brief and orderly; avoid ambiguity and obscurity.

A speaker should speak in a way that can be understood, while minimizing misunderstanding.

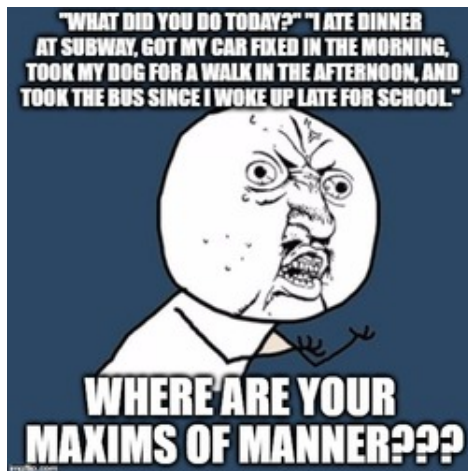
Beth took her medicine and had an allergic reaction.

This isn't orderly if the medicine was taken in response to a reaction. IMPLICATURE: The medicine caused the allergic reaction.

Another example:

Look, this is the man who Mary lives with!

This isn't brief, if this man is Mary's husband. IMPLICATURE: The man in question is not Mary's husband.



MAXIM OF QUALITY: Do not lie; do not make unsupported claims. A speaker should be truthful and not deceive others.

A plane landed in my backyard last night.

There is no good reason for a speaker to lie about planes landing in their backyards.

IMPLICATURE: The speaker has reason to believe that a plane landed in his backyard last night

Some of you asked about the violations of the maxims. Yes, we sometimes violate the maxims on purpose. For example, a speaker might also violate a maxim on purpose, so that the hearer will generate an implicature of **sarcasm**:

I really love it when you get the floors dirty right after I mopped them.

This violates quality (it's a lie); no one would love that.

IMPLICATURE: The speaker hates it when the listener does that.

A speaker might violate a maxim on purpose, so that the hearer will be **deceived**.

(Context: B has only seen Ruth's car a few times, and every time it is in terrible shape.)

A: Is Ruth's car in good shape?

B: *I've never seen it looking better!*

Violates quantity; even if literally true, it is not informative enough.