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# Pragmatics: Current Topics

Winter Semester 2017/2018, Heinrich-Heine Universität

Tuesday 8:30am-10:00am  
Room 23.32 – U1.21

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## *Instructor*

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## *General Information*

**Goals of the course** Pragmatics is the study of the ways we enrich utterances, “what we say”, into their fuller intended meanings, “what we mean”. However complex this enrichment may be, it is also systematic and quite pervasive. The goal of this course is to study some of the latest current state of affairs of a variety of pragmatic phenomena, focusing on *conversational implicatures* and *presuppositions*. Conversational implicatures are inferences that arise through reasoning about the speaker’s adherence to certain background assumptions pertaining some unspoken rules of “cooperative” conversation. Presuppositions, in turn, can be loosely described as information that the speaker takes for granted. (Time permitting, we may also dip a little into other topics such as *speech acts*, *contexts* and *discourse*) Through the study of these phenomena, we will discover that pragmatics is also a type of meaning in natural language that is amenable to formal analysis. In fact, upon closer inspection, some of these effects suggest that the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is not so obvious after all. The course involves substantial homework assignments with reading and comprehension exercises as well as writing a final paper.

**Pre-requisites** The course assumes familiarity with the conceptual foundations of pragmatics (*vs.* semantics) and basic logic and set theory. You can still take (and succeed!) in this class in the absence of this background, but it means that you may need to do some more foundational readings at the beginning of the semester. If you are in doubt about whether this class is for you, please contact me.

**Website** There is a website for this course (see above). There you will find the lecture notes, readings, homeworks and handouts covering the materials and discussion from previous classes. I expect you to visit the website regularly, as it is the central hub of information and document dissemination outside of class. If you miss class, checking the website for what you missed should be the very first thing you do.

**Textbook** There is no required textbook for this class. All assigned readings will be posted online on the website. If you really want a textbook, let me know and I will provide you with recommendations.

## Assessment

**Beteiligungsnachweis (2 ECTS)** In order to get a BN, you must get at least 50% of the total available homework points. Class participation is strongly encouraged (see below).

**Abschlussprüfung (6 ECTS)** In order to qualify for the AP, you must meet the requirements for the BN, and furthermore do one of the following two things. You can either (i) do the AP entirely through homework assignments, or (ii) write a term paper. The homework-based AP grades will be assigned like this:

| Percentage | Grade |
|------------|-------|
| > 90%      | 1     |
| > 80%      | 2     |
| > 70%      | 3     |
| > 60%      | 4     |

The term paper can take a number of different forms. You could, for example, choose a classic paper in pragmatics, make up reading comprehension exercises for it and write a critical report about it. Alternatively, you could elaborate on some aspect of the materials we worked on in class, or apply what you learned to analyze a some pragmatic phenomenon that did not get much attention during the class. At any rate, **you must talk to me and agree with me on a term paper before you decide to write it.** Because of university regulations, I must allow the term paper to be written in German or English, but please bear in mind that my German comprehension is limited.

## Class Policies

**Homework** Homework assignments consist of a set of questions and exercises pertaining to the reading and associated lecture, and each question is worth a certain number of points. (The total number of points may vary from assignment to assignment.) The answers must be written in English. You may consult with other students in the class, but you *must* write up your answers by yourself. Please type up your assignments, put your name on them, print them out, staple them, and bring them with you to class, because we will discuss them in class on the day that they are due. Homework assignments must be typed. Late homework assignments will be accepted, with a 20% reduction in your score for each day that it is late. Your homework is late if you fail to turn it in before class begins the day it is due. You can bring late assignments to the main office of the linguistics department and leave them in my mailbox. After turning in your homework you can *revise* it and turn in a new version by noon on the day the homework is due.

Keep in mind: pragmatics is not so much about reading and memorizing terms and facts; it's about practicing how to analyze the data using the tools we learn. You can only get good at this with practice. Doing the homework is the only way to learn.

**Collaborating on Homeworks** Collaborating on homeworks is allowed and encouraged, but you must independently write up and turn in your own answers. That is, you can discuss the homeworks with one another, but by turning in your homework you are certifying that it represents your understanding of the material, not someone else's. Thus, when you collaborate with someone, **please write on the homework the name(s) of your collaborator(s).**

Copying another person's homework is **not** acceptable collaboration, it is academic dishonesty, and it is generally quite easy to tell when you do this. If you are so lost with an assignment that you are tempted to copy someone else's, you should stop and contact me for extra help.

**Attendance** Attendance is strongly recommend and important to do well in class; remember, there is no “official” textbook and the materials I will provide you have to be taken as guides of the lectures, discussions and exercises that will be held in class.

**Participation** Active participation in class is extremely important. The more you participate, the more you learn, and the more you help other students learn. Feel free to raise your hand whenever you are confused, you have a doubt, you think that something is wrong, or you have an idea that you want to share. Be prepared to share your own solutions to the homework that was most recently assigned.

**Exams** There is no exam. However, there might be in class short quizzes. These will be announced in class and on the website.

**Class Decorum** As I mentioned earlier, class attendance is important and missing it regularly will most probably have a negative impact on your final results. In order to profit maximally from our time in class, treating your instructor and your fellow classmates with respect at all times is a must. This includes, but is not limited to, abstaining from activities which may distract others (including me) during class. I specifically request that you not send/receive text messages, check social networks, or otherwise play with electronic devices for non-academic purposes during class. You are not invisible, and it is generally quite easy to see what you’re doing!

### *Need some help?*

Keep in touch with me whenever there is a problem, you feel lost, or generally whenever I am not making sense (yes, it happens). E-mail is the fastest and most reliable way, I check it many, many times a day. I am very happy to answer questions on the content of course material and homework by email and I’m often prompt. Note, however, that it will take me longer to respond if you email me late in the evening or during weekends. If you need extra help, I am available for appointments, you only need to email me or talk to me after class to set up an appointment. Oftentimes, a single meeting can solve issues that hundreds of emails can’t!

### *Important Dates*

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| First day of class | 10/10 |
| Reformationstag    | 31/10 |
| Weihnachtsferien   | 26/12 |
| Weihnachtsferien   | 02/01 |
| Last day of class  | 30/01 |

## *Rough plan*

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| WEEK 1  |   |
| 10/10   | Overview & basics                                   |
| WEEK 2  |   |
| 17/10   | Gricean pragmatics                                  |
| WEEK 3  |   |
| 24/10   | The neo-gricean turn                                |
| WEEK 4  |   |
| 31/10   | <b>NO CLASS!</b>                                    |
| WEEK 5  |   |
| 07/11   | Free-choice & ignorance                             |
| WEEK 6  |   |
| 14/11   | Conversational implicatures in the grammar?         |
| WEEK 7  |   |
| 21/11   | Experimental pragmatics                             |
| WEEK 8  |   |
| 28/11   | Probabilistic approaches to implicature calculation |
| WEEK 9  |   |
| 05/12   | Presuppositions                                     |
| WEEK 10 |   |
| 12/12   | Satisfaction theory & the projection problem        |
| WEEK 11 |   |
| 19/12   | Presuppositions in context                          |
| WEEK 12 |   |
| 09/01   | Cancellation: when and how?                         |
| WEEK 13 |   |
| 16/01   | Speech acts   |
| WEEK 14 |   |
| 23/01   | Embedding speech-acts                               |
| WEEK 15 |   |
| 30/01   | Final review  |

