Ling 207: Pragmatic Theory

UCLA ● Fall 2018

Course information:

M/W 12:00PM – 1:30PM
Public Affairs 2292

Instructors:

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1 Overview

Pragmatics explores the systematic relation between *what was intended* and *what was literally said* by examining what inferences can be made from a sentence meaning in a particular context of utterance, given what is known about the speaker and the participants in the discourse. Once treated as a virtual unstructured wasteland of non-linguistic information, pragmatics is reaching a new maturity as it more closely interfaces with linguistic subsystems.

Pragmatic research addresses a notoriously broad domain. In designing the course, we have emphasized the **theoretical** components of pragmatics research, focusing on topics that highlight the internal structure of pragmatic mechanisms or the ways in which pragmatic information is embedded within the architecture of the language faculty. We also introduce methods and ongoing developments in **experimental pragmatics**, an area that has become a driving force in shaping research interests in the field.

This course starts by reviewing the classic cooperative foundations of pragmatic theory initiated by Grice, and then highlights recent advances in the field, concentrating on four major topics:

1. Pragmatic theory and implicatures since Grice 1975
2. Projection and not-at-issue content
3. Speech acts and speaker commitments
4. Questions under discussion and discourse coherence

2 Goals of the course

Our goals are to provide a conceptual foundation in pragmatic theory, while helping students acquire tools for working within this area.

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Concepts. Pragmatic research is rife with theoretically rich terminology, which has developed over several decades from many competing frameworks. Consequently, pragmatic theorists sometimes use the core concepts in different ways. The course is designed to help identify the major concepts and to help you understand why the distinctions are important and useful. In particular, we hope that, by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Identify and defend central distinctions, for example, between:

  1. Literal (what was explicitly said) and intended / construed meaning
  2. Kinds of speech acts
  3. At issue vs. not at issue content
  4. Conversational implicatures, presuppositions, conventional implicatures, at-issue
  5. Kinds of coherence relations

- Articulate and evaluate various positions regarding the role of context in determining content

- Have some historical understanding on how Pragmatic Theory developed and is evolving:

  1. Enriching intended meaning via rational/intentional means
  2. Conventionalization
  3. Grammaticalization of pragmatic operations
  4. Multidimensionalism
  5. Structuring discourse information
  6. Expanding the empirical coverage, including cross linguistic research and experimentation

- Critically evaluate the relation between pragmatics and grammar (and its interfaces)

- Appreciate that there are many grey areas, which will take data and argumentation to resolve

- Understand of where Pragmatic Theory is headed and the choice-points that await us

Skills. Students will also have opportunities to put theory into practice within with short problem sets (consisting of no more than 2-3 questions). Assignments are meant to generate questions, in addition to solidifying the core concepts. Examples of skills include:

- Working through examples of Gricean maxims and Neo-Gricean principles

  Example: What maxim(s) does this example illustrate?

- Applying standard tests for implicature, presuppositions, conventional implicature, etc.

  Example: Which of these elements passes the family of sentences test? What elements of this sentence are non-cancellable?

- Working with basics of multidimensional frameworks

  Example: Sketch a multidimensional derivation for a sentence with an epithet or an appositive.

- Using basics of discourse management

  Example: Show a step-by-step illustration of how information moves from the Table to common ground.
  Another example: Show what questions under discussion are compatible with this utterance.

- Evaluating experimental designs and the extent to which they adequately address theoretical issues in pragmatics

    Example: Design an experiment that tests whether implicature is drawn globally or locally and note any potential confounds or design flaws.

3 Course requirements

Assessment: There are two and four credit options. The two credit option will consist of informal participation. The four credit option includes all of the requirements below.

Informal participation	20%	Participate during in-class discussions
Formal participation	20%	Completion of online questions and in-class exercises, short assignments, and participation in workshoping your final paper topic
Research paper	60%	Final research paper, with an in-class presentation

Informal participation: Students should prepare for class by carefully reading the assigned texts and contribute to in-class discussion. If you feel you cannot participate during class or are uncomfortable doing so, please contact you instructors who may be able to find you an alternative.

Formal participation: Formal participation will most likely involve three froms of participation: answering short discussion questions online, completing short homework assignments to discuss in class, and workshopping final paper topics.

Discussion questions: On occasion, 1–2 questions will be posted on the CCLE message board to be completed before the night before class.

Homework assignments: Short problem sets will be given to students a few days before they are due in class. The problems are intended to (a) reinforce the central concepts or mechanics by putting them into practice, or (b) highlight unresolved issues within a framework. Not all questions will have straightforward solutions; some are meant to simply raise issues for discussion. Assignments may be discussed in class and will not be graded. We anticipate assigning 4–5 assignments.

Final paper topic workshop: You will bring in a half-page handout to discuss your paper topic in pairs or in groups.

Research paper: A 10–15 pp. (single-spaced) paper is due on **Thursday, December 13th**. You should compare and contrast two treatments of a particular phenomenon that invoke at least one primitive, theoretically-relevant distinction discussed in class or in the readings.

The ideal paper will include constructive and thoughtful reviews and reflection on the recommended direction of future research. You may also use it to design or pilot pragmatic research, including experimental studies.

4 Rough schedule

Subject to change as the class progresses, so always check the website for updates!

Week	Day	Date	Who	Topic	Readings	Optional
1	M	1-Oct	H/R	Introduction	Korta and Perry 2015	
	W	3-Oct	H	Gricean pragmatics	Gamut 1991, ch. 6	Grice 1975; Chapman 2005, ch.5,9
2	M	8-Oct	R	Gricean pragmatics: Presuppositions and CIs	Potts 2015	Horn 1984, selections
	W	10-Oct	R	Neo-Gricean pragmatics	Russell 2006	Sauerland 2004
3	M	15-Oct	H	Neo-Gricean semantics	Chierchia et al. 2012	Huang 2010
	W	17-Oct	H	Experimental pragmatics	Geurts and van Tiel 2013	Ippolito 2010
4	M	22-Oct	H	Experimental pragmatics	Chemla and Spector 2011	Potts 2013
	W	24-Oct	H	Experimental pragmatics	Schwarz and Tiemann 2017	Schwarz 2016; 2018
5	M	29-Oct	–	— No class —	—	
	W	31-Oct	R	Factivity and embedding	Simons 2007	
6	M	5-Nov	R	QUD and at-issueness	Beaver et al. 2017	
	W	7-Nov	H	Speaker commitments	Gunlogson 2002; Harris and Potts 2009	
7	M	12-Nov	R	Illocutionary marking	Farkas and Bruce 2010	Farkas and Roelofsen 2017
	W	14-Nov	R	Emotive marking	Rett 2017	
8	M	19-Nov	R	Multidimensionalism	Gutzmann 2018	
	W	21-Nov	–	— No class —	–	
9	M	26-Nov	R	Discourse coherence	Kehler 2002	
	W	28-Nov	H	Discourse coherence	Kehler et al. 2008	
10	M	3-Dec	–	Presentations		
	W	5-Dec	–	Presentations		

Important dates

Week 4	Meet with instructors to discuss possible paper topics
Week 5	Workshop topics
Week 10	Presentations in class
Dec 13	Final paper due

References

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