

# Pragmatic Aspects of Meaning I: Expression Meaning, Speaker Meaning, Sentential Force and Discourse

Ling324

Reading: *Meaning and Grammar*, pg. 196-220

## Expression Meaning

- We have been so far exploring how meaning is assigned to linguistic expressions from a formal point of view.

For instance, we have said, the meaning of a declarative sentence is associated with its truth conditions which are expressed by set-theoretic statements.

- (1) a. Sam doesn't like Bill.
- b.  $[[\text{Like}(\text{Sam}, \text{Bill})]]^{M,g} = 1$  iff  
 $\langle [[\text{Sam}]]^{M,g}, [[\text{Bill}]]^{M,g} \rangle \notin [[\text{Like}]]^{M,g}$

## Speaker Meaning

- What is it for a speaker  $A$  to mean that  $p$  in uttering sentence  $\alpha$ ?

Grice's (1957) definition

Speaker  $A$  means that  $p$  in uttering  $\alpha$  to hearer  $B$  iff  $A$  intends the utterance of  $\alpha$  to lead  $B$  to adopt a certain attitude toward  $p$ , and  $A$  also intends  $B$ 's recognition of  $A$ 's intention to be instrumental in producing in  $B$  the intended attitude toward  $p$ .

Suppose Fred said *Sam doesn't like Bill* to Amy. Fred intends to produce in Amy the belief that Sam doesn't like Bill, or at least a recognition in Amy that Fred so believes. And Fred intends Amy's recognition of his intention to be instrumental in producing in Amy the belief that Sam doesn't like Bill.

## Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning

- How does a speaker meaning of  $\alpha$  and an expression meaning of  $\alpha$  relate with each other? How do speakers choose to utter  $\alpha$  with expression meaning  $p$  to convey the corresponding speaker meaning  $p$ ?

There must be conventionalized norms for using words and syntactic structures that yield the result that utterances of the sentence in question conventionally convey a certain information content.

For example, *Sam doesn't like Bill* has the truth conditions that it does because English speakers have established certain conventions of use:

E.g., When uttering *Sam*, refer to Sam, when uttering *Bill*, refer to Bill, and when uttering *like*, attribute a certain relation between the subject and the object. This specifies that in uttering the sentence, the speaker means that Sam doesn't like Bill.

## Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning (cont.)

- In some cases, speaker meaning and expression meaning may not coincide.

Speaker meaning of  $\alpha$  and expression meaning of  $\alpha$  may be different if the speaker made a mistake (e.g., a slip of the tongue).

- (2) a. Sam doesn't like Bill.  
b. Sam likes Bill.

Assume that the speaker intended to convey the meaning that Sam likes Bill. But a slip of the tongue caused her to say *doesn't like* instead of *likes*. In this case, the speaker uttered (2a), with the intention of conveying (2b), hence the discrepancy between expression meaning and speaker meaning of (2a).

## Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning (cont.)

- Speaker meaning from non-explicit linguistic expressions

- (3) a. Linda met the love of her life, and she got married.  
b. Linda got married, and she met the love of her life.

The truth-conditional meaning of (3a) and (3b) are the same.

However, a cooperative hearer would fill in the sentences in (3) as if the speaker had actually uttered the corresponding sentences in (4).

- (4) a. Linda met [the love of her life]<sub>i</sub>, and then she got married to him<sub>i</sub>.  
b. Linda got married to [someone]<sub>j</sub>, and then she met [the love of her life]<sub>k</sub>.

Speakers do not need to spell out everything in full detail. The reason is that interpretation can make use of not only linguistic knowledge but also knowledge about the discourse context, and of expectations about conversational participants as conventionally cooperative communicators.

# Connection between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning (cont.)

- Multiple levels of speaker meaning

Speakers can use utterances to mean one thing at an explicit level, but mean something else at an implicit level.

- Understatement

(5) Sam doesn't like Bill.

- Irony

(6) Yeah, that was really smart.

- Metaphors

(7) He is a block of ice.

- Indirect speech act

(8) I'd like a glass of water.

## **To Sum Up the Relation between Speaker Meaning and Expression Meaning**

Pragmatic notion of speaker meaning complements semantic account of expression meaning in two ways:

- It provides an insight into what it is for a linguistic expression to be used meaningfully: i.e., it provides a way to connect abstract linguistic meaning with what people do by means of using language.
- It helps us to understand how interpretations of actual utterances might sometimes fail to coincide with the linguistically assigned interpretations of expressions uttered.

# Propositional Content and Sentential Force

- The meaning of a sentence consists of two components: propositional content and sentential force (Cf., Frege).

Different sentence types contribute different sentential force.

The sentences in (9) have more or less the same propositional content, but have different sentential force.

(9) Suppose Mary uttered following sentences.

- a. Declarative:  
John did well on the exam.
- b. Interrogative:  
Did John do well on the exam?
- c. Imperative:  
Do well on the exam, John.

- (10) a.  $\vdash$ [John did well on the exam]  
b. ? [John did well on the exam]  
c. ! [John does well on the exam]
- (11) a. Mary stated that John did well on the exam.  
b. Mary asked whether John did well on the exam.  
c. Mary told John to do well on the exam.

Sentence type	Sentential Force
Declarative	Statement ('state that')
Interrogative	Question ('ask whether')
Imperative	Directive ('tell to')

# The Contribution of Sentential Force to the Discourse

How can we account for the meaning of sentential force?

- Sentential force can be modeled as a context-changing function. That is, by uttering a particular sentence type, a certain change takes place in a discourse context (Stalnaker 1974, 1978; Heim 1983).

- Meaning of a declarative sentence:

$[[\vdash S]]$  = a function that takes S together with the discourse context in which it is uttered, and yields a new discourse context.

## The Contribution of Sentential Force to the Discourse (cont.)

Dynamics of discourse context: Here, we will see how we can formally characterize a changing discourse context, assuming that each utterance by discourse participants is a declarative sentence.

- As a discourse progresses, its participants jointly develop a slate of discourse commitments, called *common ground*.

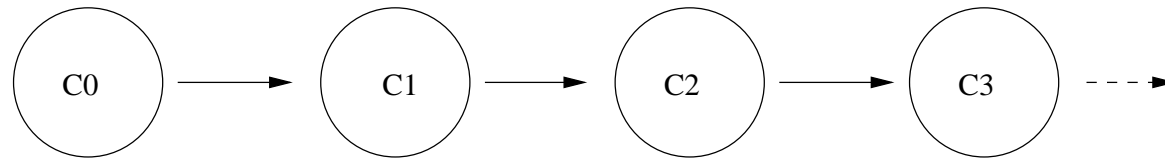
Common ground represents what the discourse participants assume to be mutual beliefs and shared knowledge. It includes the thoughts they have stated to one another as long as they have not been challenged or withdrawn.

- A common ground can be thought of as a set of propositions that represents the participants mutual beliefs and shared knowledge.

A common ground is consistent and coherent. That is, the propositions representing a common ground are consistent with each other. For example, *John likes Mary* and *John doesn't like Mary* will not both be in a common ground at the same time.

## The Contribution of Sentential Force to the Discourse (cont.)

- C0 represents the common ground at the initial point of discourse. It may include previous shared history of the participants, world knowledge, the purpose of the discourse and so on.



- As a declarative sentence is uttered, the propositional content of that sentence is added, changing the common ground to C1.
- As a new proposition is added to a common ground, all other propositions that are entailed as a result are also added.

C1: John likes Sam.
New proposition: Sam is a woman.
C2: John likes Sam. Sam is a woman. John likes a woman.

## The Contribution of Sentential Force to the Discourse (cont.)

- If a new proposition is not consistent with the current common ground, the discourse participants either reject the new proposition, or some other proposition in the common ground is abandoned.

C2:

John likes Sam.

Sam is a woman.

John likes a woman.

New proposition:

John hates every woman.

C3:

Sam is a woman.

John hates every woman.

John hates Sam.

- The discourse will progress, as participants work together to keep each stage of the common ground consistent, resolving conflicts when necessary.